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Mixed Laughter: Mediating Multiracial Identities in American Ethnic Comedy

by

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B.A. (University of Minnesota, Minneapolis) 1988
M.A. (University of California, Davis) 1990

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Abstract

Mixed Laughter:

Mediating Multiracial Identities in American Ethnic Comedy

by Darby Li Po Price

Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnic Studies

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Barbara C. Christian, Chair

This dissertation analyzes the mediation and cultural production of multiracial identities in Euro-American, African American, Chicano/Latino, Native American, Asian American Hapa, Filipino American, and Hawaiian comic traditions. By emphasizing sites of multiethnicity rather group boundaries, this study expands the conception of ethnic humor beyond the body of works which approach race and ethnicity as homogenous, fixed, and oppositional entities. This study reveals how particular socio-political histories and identity politics shape, constrain, and/or privilege particular expressions of race and ethnicity.

Dominant groups have historically denied that certain groups have a sense of humor and have simultaneously made them the targets of disparaging humor as a means of marginalization. In the United States mixed race, Native American, Chicano, Asian, female, and gay identities have been stereotyped as humorless, lacking the ability to tell jokes, or essentially tragic figures. Most studies of ethnic humor regard multiethnic identities as existing outside of

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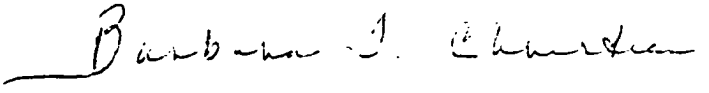
established groups and therefore as the targets of rather than the creators of humor. Focusing on multiracial comic agency, this study topples the trope of seriousness that dominates the mixed race discourse.

Informed by cultural theories of comedy as a discourse of power, I analyze how comedians mediate multiracial identities in literature, film, television, theater, sketch comedy, standup, and performance art. In addition, this study draws upon extensive ethnographic research, observation, and interviews I conducted among comedians in California, New York, Hawaii, and Massachusetts.

The project is particularly timely due to a significant increase in the diversity of performers, audiences, and the larger population during the 1990s. Current debates over the meaning of race and racism in America heightens the significance of multiracial identities as a site for understanding and transforming social constructions of race and ethnicity.



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Acknowledgments

I wish to acknowledge Professors Barbara C. Christian, Terry Wilson, Hertha D. Sweet Wong, and Darrell Y. Hamamoto for their invaluable assistance and encouragement of this project. Barbara's writings on the tragic mulatta inspired me to approach mixed race as a site of humor. Terry's course on people of mixed racial descent reinforced my interest in studying comic aspects of multiraciality. Hertha's work on work on ethnic autobiography furthered my interest in personal narratives. Darrell's research on Asian Americans and popular culture influenced my decision to include film, television, and other forms of popular media in my study.

I express my gratitude to the Department of Ethnic Studies for providing a supportive and safe place for the study of race and ethnicity. My appreciation also to the Graduate Opportunity Program for providing me with fellowship support.

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Chapter One

THEORIES OF ETHNIC HUMOR

Comedy provides a popular arena for airing and transgressing societies tensions, anxieties, and norms. Due to the antagonistic nature of racial and ethnic relations in the United States, comedy involving ethnic humor often stirs up controversy over its meaning and intentions. An overview of scholarly debates over how to analyze humor provides insight into some of the theoretical issues involved in assessing the meaning of ethnic jokes.

Marcel Gutwirth writes in Laughing Matter: An Essay on the Comic (1993) that there have been three major theoretical approaches to the study of humor.[1] Intellectualist approaches view humor in terms of mental pleasure or entertainment that comes from recognizing incongruities in language structures. Psychological approaches to humor emphasize psychological states, motives, and desires of its users and receivers. Functional approaches attempt to explain purposes on a large societal scale, such as reinforcing or disrupting societal hierarchies between groups. After discussing the relevance

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and shortcomings of these theoretical approaches to interpretations of ethnic humor, I will explain how drawing upon cultural theories allow me to analyze meanings from relationships between ethnic comedy, creators, and the contexts from which they arise.

Intellectualist

Intellectualist theories evaluate humor in terms of the intellectual pleasures that come from recognizing incongruities in social binaries. From an intellectualist perspective, enjoyment arises as hidden meanings are suddenly revealed in an unexpected way. Intellectualist approaches tend to defend ethnic humor as "merely entertainment".

Primarily concerned with categorizing types of humor, most intellectualist studies of ethnic humor tend to overlook connections between texts, contexts, and their creators. Mohadev Apte observes in Humor and Laughter: An Anthropological Approach (1985) that most studies of ethnic humor do not relate ethnic humor to the larger socio-cultural context. Most folklorists, anthropologists, and sociologists focus on content analysis of published jokes and overlook socio-contextual factors such as social setting, participants' ethnic

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identity, or rhetorical motives. While focusing on the effect on receivers, communication and psychological studies of ethnic humor de-emphasize textual and contextual analysis. Such studies abstract humor texts from the identities and contexts from which they arise.[2]

From the intellectualist approach, people should not be offended by ethnic jokes because they are "just jokes". From the corpus of research on ethnic humor, Apte refers to Davies' Ethnic Humor Around the World (1990) as the "most authoritative crosscultural study" of ethnic humor.[3] Basing his study on "authorless" jokes, Christie Davies writes "it is pointless to look behind them for the kinds of motives, purposes, and feelings that characterize a single author" for "the humor they convey is not tied to a particular context" (3). Davies concludes that most joke-telling is done as "an end in itself" and "not as a means to some other end" (9).

In abstracting humor texts from their creators and social contexts, approach such as Davies' deny individual agency as well as the cultures from which they were created.
In reviewing Davies' work, Lawrence Mintz writes "the method has limits which prevent it from addressing some of the most crucial aspects of the study of the phenomenon of ethnic

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humor."[4] Richard Bauman writes in Folklore, Cultural Performances and Popular Entertainments: A Communication Handbook (1992) that because communication is "rooted in social relationships and produced in the conduct of social life. To treat language or literature or music as autonomous systems is an analytical abstraction."[5] Gerald Vizenor writes in Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Literatures (1989) that because of their preoccupation with categorizing types of jokes such studies deny people as individuals and overlook humor as a dialogic process between competing cultural points of view.[6]

Psychological

Psychological approaches examine how humor influences or reflects the mental state of its users or receivers. Viewing ethnic humor as reflecting cultural anxieties, Secor writes in "Ethnic Humor in Early American Jest Books" (1987) that "there are few better indicators of the cultural anxieties and tensions behind ethnic attitudes than the jokes people tell" (163).[7] Psychological approaches often make interpretations about the role of humor in fulfilling emotional desires and needs among individuals as well as among groups.

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Some psychological approaches discuss the therapeutic effects of ethnic humor. Explaining how humor helps resolve tensions, comedian Bertrice Berry says "Alice Walker once said `there's a point that even grief becomes absurd and at that point laughter gushes up to retrieve sanity.'--That's why I'm a comedian, to keep from killing people."[8] Focusing on the psychological benefits of Jewish ethnic humor among Jews, David A. Harris and Izrail Rabinovich write in The Jokes of Oppression: The Humor of Soviet Jews (1988) that Jews use humor to cope with their oppression.[9]

From a psychological emphasis on how jokes reflect mindsets on a group level the humor of the marginalized may be viewed as a window into the mind of the oppressed. Interpreting Jewish humor from a psychological perspective, Leo Rosten writes in The Joys of Yiddish (1969) "in nothing is Jewish psychology so vividly revealed as in Jewish jokes".

Psychological approaches that draw from Freudian theory view ethnic humor as forms of sexual anxiety. For example, Alan Dundes asserts in Cracking Jokes: Studies of Sick Humor Cycles and Stereotypes (1987) that "elephant jokes" were created by whites as a way to discuss their anxieties towards black sexuality.[10] Taking a Freudian approach has led

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anthropologists such as Alan Dundes and Victor Barnouw, and Martin Pops, to interpret Native American trickster tales involving creation myths as anal and fecal fascination, and pregnancy envy.[11] Yet, it is notable that most Native Americans disagree with such interpretations of trickster figures[12] , which reveals some of the problems of psychological studies of humor that rely on a universal cultural framework.

Functionalist

Whereas psychological approaches to humor see humor as a window into the psychology of its users rather than social contexts, functional approaches view ethnic humor in terms of larger social functions such as preserving or disrupting societal order or norms. Functionalist approaches relevant to ethnic humor can be organized in terms of theories of superiority, assimilation, and subversion.

Superiority theories views ethnic humor as a way to reinforce group boundaries by defining the ingroup norms and values as superior, and outgroup norms and values as inferior. Apte refers to "ethnic humor" as "an integral part of expressive culture, which reflects a group's perception and evaluation of other group's personality traits, customs, behavior patterns,

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and social institutions by the standards of ingroup culture, with its positive or negative attitude towards others" (Apte 1985: 121). The abundance of derisive ethnic jokes have led some scholars to equate ethnic humor with derision of outgroups.

From the perspective that ethnic humor is a means to establish and reinforce dominant values by casting a negative attitude towards others, ethnic humor functions to create ingroup norms by ascribing negative traits to outgroups. Hernandez explains that in the Western tradition of satire, rhetorical devices such as comedy, humor, jest, parody, wit and so forth, designed to represent the marginal negatively as stereotypical figures in opposition to the ideal principles and behavior upheld by the dominant group.

Jack Levin and Jack McDevitt write in Hate Crimes: The Rising Tide of Bigotry and Bloodshed (1993) "at the group level, racial humor is primarily created to attain some sense of self-esteem and solidarity at the expense of another racial group". For the dominant group, humor may be used to boost their sense of superiority over other groups. However, such humor may fuel hostile attitudes among the ingroup towards the targets of its humor. Levin and McDevitt discuss a "culture of hate" where not belonging to the in-group is used to

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dehumanize and insult that person or group.

Levin and McDevitt consider humor that derides others on the basis of group association to be forms of hate crime. The United States Congressional Hate Crime Statistics Act of 1990 defines hate crimes as "crimes that manifest evidence of prejudice based on group characteristics" associated with "race, religion, sexual orientation, or ethnicity." (247-249) Drawing upon data from advocacy organizations and police reports, Levin and McDevitt note that hate crimes are on the rise. Regarding derisive humor to be a form of hate crime, they discuss a current rise in "attack comedy" based on "collective intolerance and slurring" of minorities, women, gays, and other vulnerable people.(34)[13] As an example of "attack comedy," Levin and McDevitt cite Sam Kinison's joke about famine in Africa: "Of course those silly motherfuckers in Ethiopia are dying" "whoever told them to live in a desert? Human beings are not supposed to live in a fucking desert!"(36) According to Levin and McDevitt, negative stereotypes "justify hate crimes in the mind of the perpetrator by providing him with the essential dehumanized images of vulnerable individuals . . . it becomes a good deal easier to attack or kill `a urine-colored person with a towel on his head.'" (43) From a functionalist

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perspective, jokes that dehumanize contribute to hostilities, divisiveness, and conflicts between groups rather than intergroup harmony and cooperation, or understanding.

Many jokes reflect and reflect a death wish attitude towards minorities: "What do you call 49 JAPs face down in deep water? A good beginning!" (124) [JAP is an acronym for Jewish American Princess, as well as a person of Japanese descent] The structure of this type of joke is basically interchangeable for any targeted group. For example, a legacy of jokes with similar sentiments, commonly referred to as "nigger jokes," target blacks. For example, there are a series of jokes that begin with "Do you know what a `shame' is?" and have punchlines such as "a busload of niggers went over a cliff and there were two empty seats." Here, even though a busload of African Americans were killed, it is assumed to be "a shame" that two more of them were not killed, as there were two empty seats on the bus. Boskin and Dorinson write that such jokes reinforce status hierarchies between groups: "oppressors employ ridicule to maintain conformity to the status quo by adhering to iron-bound stereotypes." (116) From this perspective, ethnic humor is used to ascribe status to groups.

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Assimilation theories view ethnic humor as a way to help or encourage minorities to identify with dominant norms and values. In the United States, the dominant Anglo-Saxon group has historically pressured people from minority ethnic groups to culturally assimilate to its Protestant orientation by denigrating other cultural behaviors. John Lowe writes in "Theories of Ethnic Humor: How to Enter, Laughing"[14] that ethnic humor is a significant part of American culture because of its connection with mythical concepts of our national ritual of "Americanization." (439) Addressing positive aspects of ethnic humor in assisting minorities to "enter into full citizenship", Lowe writes "this procedure has sometimes been both shortened and sweetened when they have made up their minds to enter laughing--using the more delightful aspects of ethnic-generated humor to win friends, acceptance, and material success." (439) From Lowe's perspective, humor helps dissolve the cultural differences between groups by encouraging minorities to want to disassociate from the negative behaviors associated with ethnic groups.

One of the assumptions of assimilationist theories is the belief that all groups can achieve the same social status if they follow the same behavioral patterns. However, long-standing

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social and material structures have caused qualitative differences in experiences that have prevented full equality for all groups. One shortcoming of assimilationist assumptions is that all minority groups want to assimilate or give up their ethnic identities in exchange for membership in the dominant group. Another shortcoming is that many members of the dominant group resist the idea that peoples of non-European can be fully American.

Most Euro-Americans are less likely to direct hostility towards European ethnic minorities than towards non-European ethnics. One reason is that they are able to distinguish non-European physical features from the dominant Anglo population to a greater degree. Moreover, Anglos and other people of European descent are less likely to direct their anger towards minorities of European descent because of historical beliefs that America belongs to people of European descent. Another contributing factor in hostilities directed towards people of non-European descent are associated beliefs that the American way of life is being undermined by non-whites and others who deviate from dominant social standards.

In spite of public policies since the 1950s designed to reduce inequality and increase opportunities for people of

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color, women, the disabled, and gays, significant barriers to protecting the rights of minority citizens remain. The public's attitudes towards these policies and the people they are designed to protect has been mixed. Many who feel the policies unfairly compromise equal opportunity, or that such minorities somehow undermine or pose a threat to "American" standards of living, have expressed resentment and hostility towards minorities in the form of "hate crimes." Such factors confound assimilationist theories based on the idea that all ethnic groups will achieve equal status as soon as they culturally assimilate into the dominant American society.

The functionalist perspectives that view humor as subversive approach humor as a means for peoples to challenge dominant perceptions. M. M. Bahktin wrote about how folk humor functioned in Russia to raise consciousness beyond the official social constructions of the state and church. According to Bahktin, "parody constituted as genres--satyr-drama, improvised comedy, satire, plotless dialogue" functions to "force men to experience beneath these categories a different and contradictory reality that is otherwise not captured in them." (59)[15] Applying Bahktin's belief that humor creates "a different reality," ethnic humor can be employed as a

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tool to raise consciousness beyond stereotypes and other ethnic misconceptions based on categorical thinking.

In the United States' context of Anglo-conformity, minority ethnic groups have been categorized and stigmatized as symbols of inferiority. Marginalized peoples have historically employed a variety of comic devices to subvert dominant attempts to categorize them as inferior. Boskin notes that the Irish tended to deflate the powerful, a tendency rooted in the Irish tradition of opposition against the English." Sharing the "humor of oppression", Jews and blacks "generated several distinctive forms of expression such as gallows humor, the ironic curse, double meanings, trickster tales, and retaliatory jokes." (109) Boskin and Dorinson explain that ethnics in retaliation have created a world of internal joking, where they are often not palatable for outside consumption, "often reverse roles on their adversaries by striving for a language of acceptance." (116) From the superiority perspective, such role reversals serve as a strategy of cultural survival.

In discussing how the Native American comic trickster figure counters dominant interpretations of Native Americans, Gerald Vizenor explains that dominant stereotypes such as the "brutish savage" or "noble savage" "are hypotragic impositions

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that deny a comic world view--the racist denial of tribal languages . . . trickster unties the hypotragedies imposed on tribal narratives." (11) Further exemplifying how trickster counters dominant approaches to knowledge, Vizenor writes "the trickster and comic liberator craves chance in agonistic imagination to lessen the power of social science and bourgeois humanism . . . [trickster] is a communal sign, comic discourse, and does not represent aesthetic modernism in narratives or the glorification of isolated individualism." (192-193) Along these lines, ethnic humor can be approached as a means to subvert rather dominant authority and conceptions of reality.

Cultural Theory

Cultural theories view humor as a discourse of power between competing groups and consider what as well as whom is widely considered to be funny to be greatly determined by dominant values, attitudes, and beliefs. Susan Purdie writes in Comedy: the Mastery of Discourse (1992) that dominant groups have historically dehumanized certain groups by making them the targets of derogatory jokes while simultaneously denying that such peoples have a sense of humor. Whereas Purdie bases her observations on how German philosophers denied

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that Jews and women had a full sense of humor, in the United States the dominant culture stereotyped mixed race, Native American, and Asian identities as bereft of humor[16]

The simultaneous denial and objectification as targets of humor of people of mixed descent is also evident in dominant theories of ethnic humor. Interrethnic marriages and offspring have been recognized as staples of ethnic humor.[17] However, viewed as existing outside societal norms, multiethnic peoples are viewed primarily as the targets of humor rather than the creators of humor. Making such an observation, Christie Davies writes in Ethnic Humor Around the World that the "ethnically ambiguous," those "peoples who cannot easily be fitted into the crude categories of `insiders' and `outsiders,' `us' and `them,'" are most likely to become the butts of ethnic jokes (Davies 1990:314)

Cultural theories view cultures as interactive processes that are constantly being created and negotiated through language. Such a view of culture allows us to analyze meanings that arise from interconnections among jokes, creators, and social contexts from which they arise. Whereas the texts of "authorless" ethnic jokes may be difficult to analyze in terms of the motives and contexts of their creators, standup comedy

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routines provide us with texts that can be more readily connected to their authors and the contexts from which they arise. One facet of ethnic humor in standup comedy that reveals the connection between utterances, self, and social context is the use of personal narrative and self-identity. This is particularly true for the stand-up comic, where self identification is often an integral part of the humor act. David Marc writes in Comic Visions: Television Comedy and American Culture (1989) that for the stand up comic "fatness, skinniness, shortness, tallness, beauty, ugliness, race, class, ethnicity, and/or whatever other visible or audible baggage the comedian carries" is "a textual feature of the act that demands use--or requires avoidance."[18]

Standup comedians often incorporate aspects of their personality to complement textual features of their act. Reflecting the connection between her own sense of self and her stage persona, Tessie Chua says she is always surprised when people tell her that they like her stage persona because "I'm not just making up a persona when I'm up there. I'm just being myself, and doing what comes naturally. I'm an angry person, so that's my main characteristic in my act."[19]

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As a form of performance, standup comedy is particularly salient to the assertion of identities as dynamic entities, and of the principle of identity as multiplistic and created. As Conquergood writes in "Rethinking Ethnography," in the context of performance "the idea of the person shifts from that of a fixed, autonomous self to a polysemic site of articulation for multiple identities and voices."[20] During their performances, comedians are given the freedom, and even expected, to shift between different characters in a way that transcends conventional identity boundaries.

Approaching comedians as cultural producers, my study emphasizes the use of ethnic humor as a means to induce their audiences to experience realities beyond the cultural boundaries of categorical thinking. Levin and McDevitt write that to reduce intergroup tensions, we need to get individuals to transfer the sympathy and understanding they have for members of their own group in the direction of the experiences of outsiders: "A first step might be help the representatives of competing groups to recognize important areas of commonality between insiders and outsiders--to realize that problems that might be associated with their own group are actually universals or nearly so." (144)

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Recognizing the importance of increasing points of commonality between groups in an increasingly heterogeneous world, I address the use of humor to subvert ethnic tensions and oppositions based on ethnic stereotypes and other rigid social categories. Gloria Anzaldua writes in Borderlands: La Fronterra/ The New Mestiza (1987):

> the answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war.[21]

By increasing our consciousness beyond the language of categories, ethnic humor can serve as a way to reduce cultural tensions on both an individual as well as larger societal level.

Social ambiguity and instability that accompanies cultural synthesis between groups increases the potential for social

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change and subversion of oppressive hierarchies. Frantz Fanon writes in Wretched of the Earth (1967) de-colonization is a time of cultural instability, representational undecidability, and the creation of new cultural expressions:

> the people's intelligences and the constant principles (of national art) which acted as safeguards during the colonial period are now undergoing extremely radical changes . . . in that fluctuating movement . . . will be the signal for everything to be called into question . . . it is the zone of occult instability where the people dwell that we must come.[22]

Applying a cultural theory perspective to Fanon's metaphorical "zone of occult instability" Homi Bhabha writes in The Location of Culture (1994) that "for Fanon, the liberatory people who initiate the productive instability of revolutionary cultural change are themselves the bearers of a hybrid identity."[23] Sites of cultural ambiguity and fluidity create conditions for the destabilization of cultural symbols. Referring to such sites of ambiguity as the "Third Space" Bhabha writes that the "Third

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Space" "constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity." (37) Discussing the significance of areas of cultural synthesis as sites of cultural creativity where international cultures emerge, Bhabha writes "it is the `inter'- the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space--that carries the burden of the meaning of culture . . . by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves." (38-39)

Most studies of ethnic humor have been limited by monological conceptions of ethnicity as homogenous with clear boundaries between groups. Such studies view existing ethnic groups as the norm, and relegate those who fall outside of existing groups primarily as the brunts of jokes rather than as the creators of jokes. As a counterpoint to studies that view interethnic peoples as marginal to the production of ethnic humor, my study emphasizes interethnic subjectivities as central sites of comic agency for the creation of new ethnic humor and identities. Whereas prior models of ethnic humor view jokes in terms of reinforcing or subverting ethnic boundaries between "insiders" and "outsiders", focusing on comic agency among comedians who consider themselves to

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live among and in-between multiple existing ethnic groups provides the advantage of "insider" as well as "outsider" perspectives relevant to two or more groups. Building upon cultural theories of hybridity, my study emphasizes the emergence of liberatory ethnic comedy among specific individuals that express interethnic identities and consciousness.

Going beyond an abstract universalistic classification of types of ethnic jokes, my study emphasizes how particular social and cultural dynamics relevant to different ethnic groups and interethnic relationships serve as a discursive backdrop for viewing relationships between specific comedians and the jokes they create. Guillermo Gomez-Peña writes in Warrior for Gringostroika (1993)

> when validating contemporary Latino artistic expressions (and this can apply to African America, Asian American, and Native American art), critics must take off the ethnocentric glasses of innovation and approach the work within its own framework. To understand this framework, they have to do their homework.[24]

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To provide a framework for analyzing how mediations of multiethnic identities in American comedy reflect socio-political forces specific to particular contexts, the following chapter provides a historical overview of American cultural and racial dynamics that have shaped conditions for multiethnic comic agency among comedians of partial Euro-American, African American, Native American, Chicano, Asian American, and/or Hawaiian descent.

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Endnotes

[1]Marcel Gutwirth, Laughting Matter: An Essay on the Comic Ithaca: Cornell Univesity Press, 1993.

[2]See Mohadev Apte, Humor and Laughter: An Anthropological Approach Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

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[4]Lawrence Mintz, The Journal of Popular Culture 26:1, Summer 1992, 168.

[5]Richard Bauman, Folklore, Cultural Performances and Popular Entertainments: A Communication Handbook New York: Oxford University Press, xiii.

[6]Gerald Vizenor (ed.), Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literatures Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989.

[7]Robert Secor, "Early American Jest Books," in Arthur Dudden (ed.), American Humor New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

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[8]Bertrice Berry, "The World According to Us," WGBH, 1993.

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[11]John Lowe, "Theories of Ethnic Humor: How to Enter, Laughing," American Quarterly, 38:3 (1986):439-60.

Vizenor, "Trickster Discourse: Comic Holotropes and Language Games," in Gerald Vizenor (ed.), Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literatures New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1989, 203.

[12]See Vizenor 1989; Apte 1985.

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[13]Jack Levin and Jack McDevitt, Hate Crimes: the Rising Tide of Bigotry and Bloodshed New York: Plenum Press, 1993. See also, Jeffrey H. Goldstein and Paul E. McGhee, The Psychology of Humor New York: Academic Press, 1972.

[14]John Lowe, "Theories of Ethnic Humor: How to Enter, Laughing," American Quarterly 38:3 (1986): 439-60.

[15]M. M. Bahktin, The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981.

16Purdie writes "`Humour' . . . is crucially implicated in a construction of full personality. To be able to speak `properly,' to be a `proper' person." (138) Susan Purdie, Comedy: The Mastery of Discourse (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1992). In the U.S. women have also historically had their sense of humor denied. See Regina Barreca, They Used to Call Me Snow White . . . But I Drifted: Women's Strategic Use of Humor (New York: Viking, 1991). However, as a group women have made inroads into popular comedy to a significantly greater degree than mixed race, Native American, and Asian American identities.

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[17]John Lowe, "Theories of Ethnic Humor: How to Enter, Laughing," American Quarterly, 38:3 (1986):439-60.

[18]David Marc, Comic Visions: Television Comedy and American Culture Winchester, MA: Unwin Hyman, 1989, 18.

[19]Tessie Chua, personal interview, 8-27-93.

[20]Dwight Conquergood, "Poetics, Play, Process, and Power: The Performative Turn in Anthropology [Book Review Essay]." Text and Performance Quarterly 1 (1989):82-88. Cited in Linda Marie Zaer, "Cil d'aval et cil d'amont: Borderlands and the Woman Jogleor in Aucassin et Nicolette." Text and Performance Quarterly 14:1 (1994): 46-46.

[21]Gloria Anzaldua, Borderlands: La Fronterra/the New Mestiza San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987, 80.

[22]Frantz Fanon, Wretched of the Earth Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967, 182-183.

[23]Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture New York: Routledge, 1994, 37-38.

[24]Guillermo Gomez-Peña, Warrior for Gringostroika Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 1993, 50.

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Chapter Two
HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS OF AMERICAN ETHNIC COMEDY

In this chapter, I provide a historical overview of socio-cultural constructions of racial and multiracial identities in American ethnic comedy from nineteenth-century blackface minstrel shows to its twentieth-century successors in vaudeville, standup, film, radio, and mainstream Euro-American television entertainment. I follow with the emergence of counterculture, integrative, Native American, Chicano/Latino, Asian American, multicultural, and multiracial comedy.

Blackface

Blackface minstrelsy was the first and most popular form of mass entertainment during the nineteenth century in the United States.[1] Blackface minstrel shows exemplified and reflected the anxieties and tensions found in the dominant racial attitudes in the United States of their time. Initiated by whites in blackface, minstrel show characters were primarily stereotypical caricatures of Afro-Americans. Eric Lott writes in Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class (1993) that blackface

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minstrel show themes typically expressed white fears of black uprising and anti-miscegenation.

Blackface was initially a form of racial parody in which whites cross-dressed as black. Because cross-dressing contains multiple possibilities in theory, blackface can also be viewed as a form of racial or cultural boundary crossing or subversion. Theorists who subsume race within ethnicity consider blackface to be a form of play whereby ethnic stereotypes are used to undermine the stereotypes being evoked. According to Eric Lott blackface caricature demeaned blacks but also celebrated black language and performance styles. According to W.T. Lhamon, blackface represented white lower class rejection of white upper class culture. By using black parodies of their masters against a white European-oriented cultural elite, blackface "passed well beyond racist travesty" to serve as a popular way to make fun of the moral pretensiousness, self-control, and thrift of the master culture. However, as Michael Rogin notes, conceptions of blackface minstrelsy as a form of interracial class-based solidarity overlook the "actual exclusion of African-Americans from their own representations and on the grotesque, demeaning, animalistic blackface mask. . . "(Rogin 37) The roles that were allowed as well as who was allowed to perform them were rigidly proscribed. Blackface minstrel shows provided comedy

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through one-dimensional caricatures of blacks which served as the brunt of humor.[2]

Drawing dominant stereotypes, four major impersonations were developed which reduced black and women to caricatures. The uneducated black male country bumpkin fool or buffoon known as the Black Sambo figure was cast in ragged clothes with a thick dialect. Sambo's counterpart was a fashionably dressed city black who boasted of his prowess with women, and was referred to as Zip Coon. Both caricatures reinforced white beliefs that black men needed to be controlled. For women it was the tragic mulatta, a taboo sexual object, and her counterpart Mammy, the overweight masculinized domestic servant. In her discussion of the politics of sex and stereotypes of African Americans Patricia Morton writes in Disfigured Images: The Historical Assault on Afro-American Women (1991) of four central figures "the sex object, the `tragic mulatto' who failed in her misguided attempt to pass as white, the inept and comical domestic servant, and the masculinized, domineering matriarch . . . shaped to composite picture of a definized female failure" (7).[3] The figure of the mammy--a large, unsexed, domineering, domestic black woman--exemplified the patriarchal relationship whereby blacks were cast to serve whites. The "'mammy' bestowed her unconditional love on white families.

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Constructions of the happy mammy overlooked the reality that these women were forced to care for the master's family over the welfare of their own children.

The most popular of African American blackface comedians, Bert Williams, adopted the persona of the "Shuffling, inept `nigger'" and spoke in a stage language that, in his words "to me was as much a foreign dialect as that of the Italian." (Rogin 43) His most popular song "Nobody" reflected the lowliness of the figure he portrayed. Projections of blacks as fools helped justify the dominant prejudices and patronism towards African Americans. Watkins writes "the image of the craven, irresponsible, ignorant Negro buffoon was by then a national symbol." (408) Viewed as stupid, they were not seen as a threat to white society. Being relegated to "simplistic" roles hindered their ability to present intelligent or socially critical material.

Both Judith Butler and Michael Rogin argue performativity scripts identities and the more performance scripts identity, the more it serves power (Rogin 34). White males wielded the cultural and institutional power to create and maintain the form, characters, and roles of the minstrelsy tradition in blackface as well as other forms of mass popular entertainment.[41] Irish men during the nineteenth-century, then Jewish men by the early twentieth century

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disproportionately performed in blackface. Al Jolson, a Jewish man in blackface, was the most popular entertainer of his time up to the nineteen-thirties (Rogin 1996).

Tragic Mulattas and Mulattoes

Mixed race identity in the United States has been historically constructed in popular culture as well as social science as tragic. The tragic figure is characterized by an inevitable downfall. Tragedy evokes passions such as sadness, anguish, and horror arising from events that are insurmountable, while comedy evokes fun, joy, confusion, and happy ends. Although comedy may include tragic events, comic figures are open to every imaginable outcome (Bahktin 1981; Wilson 1994) Comedy is open ended and unpredictable. Theoretically speaking, comic figures can assume any destiny, improvising free of tradition to create any outcome imaginable (Bahktin 1981:36)[5] However, the American racial politics of the nineteenth and early twentieth century mandated stock characters and themes in minstrelsy.

The mixed blood as tragic sprung from the context of nineteenth century racial configuration in which miscegenation was socially as well as legally a crime. Mixed race identities were viewed

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as a threat to a monological hierarchical racial system based on distinct racial identities. With popular culture reflecting segregationist sentiments, the figure of the mulatta came to represent pathos and implied a predetermined and inevitable downfall.[6] The figure of the tragic mulatta symbolized the negative outcome of those who crossed the racial line.[7]

The historical legacy of tragic and otherwise negative portrayals of people of mixed race is a major form of suppression for mixed race identities in American culture. Naomi Zack in Race and Mixed Race (1993) refers to the tradition of negative cultural representations of mixed race people as "cultural genocide" that undermines any logical reason for people to assert mixed race identities.[8] Cultural marginalization is evident in the stigmatization and exclusion of mixed race identities in minstrelsy.

Reflecting and reinforcing dominant racial sentiments, the blackface minstrel shows of the 1830s to the early 1900s characterized mulattas as tragic or melancholy figures. Robert Toll explains that while the dark blacks provided the laughs by acting as coarse and mannerless, the light-skinned mulattas or "yaller gals" summoned feelings of pathos as objects of desire who met unhappy ends: "yaller gals . . . were not comedy parts" for they "provided coquettish, flirtatious, happy romances, and sad, untimely deaths".[9]

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Some studies regard minstrelsy to be a form of interracial attraction. According to Eric Lott, minstrelsy was "a manifestation of the particular desire to try on the accents of `blackness' and demonstrate the permeability of the color line...to facilitate safely an exchange of energies between two otherwise rigidly bounded and policed cultures".[10] The tragic mulatta figure provided interracial sexual allure for white men. Her downfall resolved societal fears and taboo associated with miscegenation.

Construed as threats to a racial hierarchy maintained through separation between the races as well as to the existence of the white race itself, mixed race identity was no laughing matter. While tragic mulattas were a stock figure, mulatto characters were avoided in minstrelsy. While mulatta identity was represented by tragic themes, mixed race black male identity evoked white fears of black male sexual proliferation and uprising[11] and was therefore avoided on minstrel stages. Freda Scot Giles writes in "From Melodrama to the Movies: The Tragic Mulatto as a Type Character" "even as a joke, an image of black male sexual potency would prove too threatening, but the mulatto woman became a staple minstrel character."[12]

Since the inception of comedy as America's most popular form of mass culture, multiracial black comedians have been prevented or discouraged from expressing mixed race sensibilities in mainstream

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venues.[13] Throughout the first half of the twentieth century mixed race black men were forced to wear blackface in order to perform comic roles. Fifteen-sixteenths white in ancestry, popular pioneer African-American comedian Bert Williams wrote in his memoirs how he resented having to cover his light-skin with blackface in order to perform as a comedian. Although multiracial comedians of non-black ancestry have not had to hide their mixed heritages to the same degree as comedians of partial black ancestry, mixed race identities and sensibilities in general have been marginalized in popular entertainment.

Vaudeville

Minstrelsy's successor, vaudeville, did not so much displace as incorporate the racial sentiments of blackface. Ethnic stereotypes similar to those performed in blackface were a vaudeville staple. Vaudeville also included redface "Indians" and yellowface "Orientals" in variety-style musical shows and comedies with ethnic themes rather than plots. Indian burlesque was a vaudeville standard. The turn-of-the-century vaudeville stage also incorporated stereotypical characterizations and jokes about European minorities--Poles, Italians, Jews, etcetera--as well non-European minority ethnic

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groups.

Standup

Standup is characterized by the directness of artist and audience communication and its primary structural element is a comic monologue that is a freestanding and interactive presentation rather than part of a narrative drama or plot. (16) For the standup comedian self is an integral aspect of the text to a greater degree than for the dramatic comedian. David Marc writes "Fatness, skinniness, shortness, tallness, beauty, ugliness, race, class, ethnicity, and/or whatever other visible or audible baggage the comedian carries in life is not merely fair game for exploitation on the stage but a textual feature of the act that demands use" (18).[14]

Joey Adams in The Borscht Belt identifies the origins of the modern standup comedian in the Jewish "toomler," who began performing in clubs in the Catskills in the 1920s. Born in the context of minstrelsy and vaudeville during the early twentieth century, standup comedy developed in the resort hotels and urban nightclubs of the mid-twentieth century. Standup gained its highest popularity in the nineteen-eighties.

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As part of Euro-Americans attempts to exterminate Native Americans, they have been stereotyped as tragic, somber, and devoid of humor. In early nineteenth-century popular literature the Indian mixed blood is primarily a tragic figure. William Schiek writes in The Half Blood: A Cultural Symbol in 19th-Century American Fiction (1979) "the half-blood dies because his life among frontier perils is precarious, because his genetic constitution is thought to be inferior, because his allegiance to the white race remains dubious, because his frontier proficiency and numerical dominance menace dependent and guilt-ridden white settlers, because in short, his very being is enigmatically ambiguous" (83).[15]

By the latter part of the nineteenth-century Native Americans were seen as naturally becoming extinct and therefore no longer a threat. As the frontier disappeared Indian mixed bloods came to symbolize Euro-Americans' romanticization of the frontier. Euro-Americans viewed mixed blood Indians as proof of the success of assimilation as a means to turn Indians into Americans. While nineteenth and early twentieth century comedians of partial African ancestry such as Williams had to hide their mixture, the exceptionally popular Will Rogers (1879-1935) was able to freely

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assert his mixed European and Native American ancestry.[16]

Initially billed as the "Cherokee Kid" in vaudeville shows featuring himself as an expert at rope tricks, Will Rogers developed a style of inserting political humor between tricks. Based on his observations of dominant attitudes and social relations, Rogers' humor relied on what he believed to be the truth: "I use only one set method in my little gags, and that is to try to keep to the truth . . . I don't like the jokes that get the biggest laughs, as they are generally as broad as a house and require no thought at all. I like one where, if you are with a friend, and hear it, it makes you think, and you nudge your friend and say, `He's right about that."[17] His easy-going cowboy persona inflected with common sense commentary about American culture and politics facilitated his immense popularity.

Publicly proud of his Indian heritage, Rogers was critical of dominant views that cast Indians as savages and whites as honorable pioneers or heroes. "We're always talking about pioneers . . . . (Sterling 17) "Every man in our history that killed the most Indians has got a statue built for him." (30) These kinds of comments serve as direct challenges to dominant mythologies of heroism and moral superiority. "Thanksgiving was started by the Pilgrims, who would give thanks every time they killed an Indian and took more of his land. As years went by and they had all of his land, they changed it

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into a day to give thanks for the bountiful harvest, when the boll weevil and the protective tariff didn't remove all cause for thanks." (Sterling 31)

Rogers was critical of the status quo of white-Indian relations: "`Status Quo Ante' it's an old Cherokee word that means: This thing has gone far enough--let's go back to where we started and next time we will watch each other closer." (Sterling 30) Rogers undermines the dominant assumption that the status quo is fair and equitable and challenges the dominant view of history. Will Rogers was one of the first socially critical comedians to gain wide popular success. Rogers' easy-going and jocular down-to-earth cowboy persona put white audiences at ease.

Rogers was one of the few widely popular ethnic comedians during the early twentieth-century who was able to overtly criticize the status quo. At that time in American race relations, the public did not allow African American comedians to publicly criticize white society. It was not until the 1950s that it became more acceptable to dominant audiences to hear blacks openly critical of white society.

Euro-American comedy as mainstream

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Strongly influenced by minstrelsy, motion pictures, radio, and television emerged in the twentieth century as America's most popular forms of mass media. According to Rogin "no single institution in the first half of the twentieth century had more mass cultural importance than the motion picture business (Rogin 1996: 14). The film Birth of A Nation (1915) features two black male rapists and a mulatta seductress (performed by whites in blackface) to portray blacks as a sexual menace, and according to Rogin it was "the single most important movie ever made" (Rogin 1996: 14).

In the nineteen-thirties comedian comedy films driven by comic performances rather than plot often featured blackface. Eddie Cantor was the major film blackface comedian, featured in films such as Whoopee! (1931), Palmy Days (1931), Roman Sandals (1933), Ali Baba Goes to Town (1937), Diplomaniacs (1933), and the Marx Brother's Day at the Races (1937). "Amos and Andy", a radio show featuring white men with black voices, became the country's most popular radio show in the nineteen twenties.

White ethnic comedians were nearly totally accepted on television since its inception in the nineteen-fifties. Jewish Americans such as Jack Benny, George Burns, Milton Berle, and Sid Caeser enjoyed enormous popularity. Referring to the "dispersion" of Jewish American comedians into the national culture via television

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and the accompanying "Yiddishization of American humor," Irving Howe writes in The World of Our Fathers: The Journey of the East European Jews to America and the Life They Found and Made (1976) the "systematic flaunting of Yiddish" in television humor implied the acceptance of Jewish Americans by the larger society to the point where it was "no longer necessary to be carefull" and it was "no longer necessary to be defensive" about being a European ethnic minority for the open expression of what was once considered "Jewish vulgarity" reflected a high level of confidence and security.[18] Italian Americans were also accepted in the WASP dominated television entertainment. Second generation Italian American comedian shows included Perry Como ("The Perry Como Show, 1948-63), Frank Sinatra ("The Frank Sinatra Show", 1950-52), Julius La Rosa (The Julius La Rosa Show", 1955), Frankie Laine ("Frankie Laine Time", 1955-56), and Dean Martin ("The Dean Martin Show", 1965-74). Irish American comedians with their own shows included Ed Sullivan "The Ed Sullivan Show", 1948-71), Jackie Gleason ("The Jackie Gleason Show", 1952-55), Dennis O'Keefe ("The Dennis O'Keefe Show", 1959-60).[19]

The dissemination of comedy through radio and television led to the development of mainstream comedy. With profits based on the size of viewership as a means to secure advertisers' support serving

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as the bottom line incentive, television programmers promoted shows that could appeal to the largest audiences and increase consumer desires and confidence in the capitalist system. This meant the promotion of humor and themes that would appeal to the consumer desires and confidence of predominantly white viewers. Catering to such desires the situation comedy featuring a family through a series of episodes has become televisions' most popular genre for over forty years.[20] Darrell Hamamoto explains in Nervous Laughter: Television Situation Comedy and Liberal Democracy (1989) that the overriding theme of situation comedies has been to reinforce viewers' belief in the dominant ideology that "freedom, equality, and democracy" are the overriding traits of American society (4).[21] Situation comedies featuring African Americans emerged in the 1970s and 1980s with shows such as "The Jeffersons" and "The Cosby Show".

Counterculture

Running counter to mainstream sensibilities, counterculture comedy serves as a means to raise the audiences consciousness about society and larger social issues. In critiquing stereotypes and associated attitudes towards vulnerable groups, such humor

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functions as social critique of the status quo rather than attack comedy. In discussing differences between attack comedy and social criticism, Levin and McDermitt note that while prominent standup comics such as Lenny Bruce, Dick Gregory, Richard Pryor, and George Carlin were notorious for denigrating others, they typically directed their anger against dominant prejudices and hypocrisies held by those in power as a vehicle for social change, rather than at disempowered peoples. As such, their humor served a socially positive function.

However, the mainstream media has not widely promoted such overtly critical comedians. According to Sullivan, the majority of minority comedians have been historically labeled by society as "underground comics." The majority of the minority comedians, or let's call them underground comics, for the most part are labelled as `trouble makers'--that's society--whenever they speak their voice."

In addressing humor directed towards dominant perspectives, it is important to recognize that the power dynamics between dominant and subordinate groups mandate that hostile humor towards minority groups take on a different meaning than those directed towards the dominant group. In the United States, the dominant Anglo-Saxon group has the hegemonic power to transmit by mass media a wide range of images of themselves, while

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minorities are limited in their abilities to counterbalance dominant portrayals of them because of limited access to tools of mass representation.

In addition to having significantly greater control over the types of images transmitted about different groups, the dominant group has greater material and physical capacities to discriminate against and harm members of minority groups. Reflecting such phenomena, the Boston Police Hate Crime Tabulations of Race and Ethnicity of Victim/Offender Combinations in incidents of racial violence in Boston between 1983 and 1987 reveal that incidences of violence against each minority group is consistently dominated by white perpetrators. (244) Because of the greater threat posed by dominant perspectives, subverting dominantly held views that are a threat to society at large is of paramount importance.

In response to the 1950s context of mainstream social conformity on the one hand and overseas wars to suppress post-colonial liberatory movements in places like Korea and Vietnam, standup comedians emerged who were openly critical of dominant values and attitudes. The 1950s and 1960s were volatile times in which social attitudes about race went through major changes. Television viewers saw violent images of racial confrontations in the South. The contradictions between segregation and democracy

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challenged Americans to question their stance on race relations.

In the 1950s Mort Sahl and Lenny Bruce were two comedians emerged who helped open the doors to white audiences for socially critical African American comedians. Comparisons between Mort Sahl and Will Rogers have been made. Whereas Rogers played the role of the rural cowboy, Sahl had a more aggressive persona. Watkins writes in On the Real Side: Laughing, Lying, and Signifying--the Underground Tradition of African-American Humor that Transformed American Culture from Slavery to Richard Pryor of the aggressive intelligence of Sahl's humor at a time when most comedians were doing simplistic humor: "Sahl's humor was not only caustic and satiric but also aggressively intellectual. He was interested in ideas and concepts at a time when nearly all his peers were still wringing laughs from baggy pants, slapstick antic, and tired mother-in-law jokes; he was the first recognized comedian to reject the fifties' insistent conformity." (482)

While not receiving the mainstream success of Sahl, Lenny Bruce was a controversial comedian who challenged dominant society by graphically talking about subjects such as sex and drugs in a way that were taboo to society. Lenny Bruce often shocked his audiences with outlandish images, scatological impressions, and profane language. Bruce was a cross-over comedian as a person of Jewish

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descent who incorporated an African-American style of humor. Watkins writes "Bruce was a glib, hyper, Jewish embodiment of Norman Mailer's `white negro'. . . Bruce was one of the first white comedians to incorporate black vernacular speech and jazz jargon into his routine without intentional ridicule." (482-3) By integrating black comedy style with insightful social criticism, Bruce helped open mainstream stages for overtly critical black comedians.

Given greater opportunities to openly present their views to white audiences, African-American comedians played a significant role in causing Americans to re-evaluate their personal attitudes about racial issues. Mel Watkins notes that "since African-American entertainers were among the most visible representatives of the black community, for many Americans they assumed a disproportionately significant role in this process." (499) Complementing the urban nightclub counterculture in New York, Chicago, and San Francisco, socially critical comedians provided counterpoints to mainstream culture.

Chicano and Latino Comedy

After the United States took over northern Mexico Chicanos were viewed as Mexicans on the wrong side of the border by Anglos

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and culturally disconnected from Mexican perspectives. Rejected by both Anglo and Mexican cultures, Chicanos have been viewed as cultural misfits and "sinister clowns" from both dominant American and Mexican cultural perspectives.[22] Throughout the nineteenth-century Anglos associated peoples of Hispanic and Mexican descent with the violence of the Spanish-American War. Allen Woll writes in "Bandits and Lovers: Hispanic Images in American Film": "Hispanics in general and Mexicans in particular became characterized as violent and barbaric individuals in the media of the nineteenth century."[23]

Chicano comedians have had a tradition of addressing and asserting multiethnic identities and themes. Claiming both Spanish and indigenous Native American ancestry, Chicano identity is multiracial by definition. From the late nineteenth-century to the middle of the twentieth-century Chicano theater troupes performed primarily for Chicano communities or Latino audiences throughout the United States.

With the resurgence of Chicano culture in the nineteen-sixties a number of Chicano comedians such as Desi Arnaz, Freddie Prinze, Paul Rodriguez, and Cheech Marin gained national popularity. In the nineteen-nineties Latino[24] comedy greatly expanded with the success of Jeff Valdez' "Comedy Compadres" show with twenty episodes

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overall featuring sixty comedians televised on cable from 1993 to 1994. According to comedian Carlos Mencia "before `Comedy Compadres' young Latino comics were stuck without a venue, and successful Latinos in standup were practically nonexistent . . . Paul Rodriguez was the only one I knew about." 1996 marked the inception of the annual American Airlines Latino Laugh Festival. Also in 1996 the Latino Comedy Olympics started a year-round competition at the Improv in Los Angeles. Three of the top comedy clubs in Los Angeles--the Comedy Store, the Improv, and the Laugh Factory--feature Latino Comedy nights. In response to the lack of Latino actors in television, Jon Mercedes has compiled a list of over three hundred Latino comic actors and standup comedians, and in collaboration with Entertainment Consulting Services compiles an annual list of "the top one-hundred Latino comics and comedians"[25]

Asian American Comedy

One barrier Asian American comedians face is the prevalent perceptions that people of Asian descent are foreign, serious, hardworking, nerdy, subservient, exotic (when female)--and not funny, except as the targets of jokes. Not only is the dominant perception that Asians don't have a sense of humor found in

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historical accounts of Asians in America,[26] it is still prevalent today.[27] Such misconceptions are exacerbated by historical anti-Asian sentiments and corresponding exclusion of Asian Americans from popular cultural production.[28]

Richard Oehling in "The Yellow Menace: Asian American Images in Film" writes "the dual focus of anti-Asian prejudice: economic competition for jobs and the threat of `racial mongrelization,' of corruption of white women and miscegenation." Many Euro-Americans were just as afraid of Asian men as they were of African American men. "Of the many ethnic groups victimized, only blacks were feared so passionately on the social issue, which traditionally arouses the most violent and persistent hostility of all the various forms of prejudice."[29] Euro-Americans reflected their fear of Asians as threats to whiteness through their "yellowface" characterizations of Asians as strange foreigners in theater and film.[30]

Performed by white men in "yellowface," the character of Charlie Chan played a significant role in reinforcing the stereotype of the Asian male as a sex joke. Frank Chin writes "the 47 Charlie Chan serials and features [from 1926 to 1949] have had more influence on the mass perception of Chinese America than all of Chinese America in or out of all her Chinatowns". Chan was a shuffling Chinese immigrant and "his sons were the fools . . . They were laughable

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because they failed. They messed up the slang, wore clothes that didn't fit and mooned over women who remained oblivious to the heartache" (Chin 1973:1-2)[31] From the 1930's through the 1960's nearly a thousand pop tunes of "China Boy" stranded in America with no hope of seeing his "Ming Toy" made Chinese men in America a sex joke.

The Asian American as standup comedian defies stereotypical images of Asians as non–funny. Pat Morita explains people couldn't imagine a funny Asian when he became America's first standup comedian in the nineteen-sixties: "the general attitude of the talent buying people back then was, `Well, look here, gee whiz, a Jap comic. That can't be. Japs ain't funny. Orientals don't have a sense of humor. You guys are too straight" (Tamura 1982:42).[32] To show that people of Asian descent can be funny, Lane Nishigawa casts himself as an Asian American standup comedian in his one–man performance "I'm on a Mission for Buddha." He explains "I wrote that character specifically to change people's images of what Asians are. The general public here in America thinks we're foreigners, that we're serious, that we're all accountants .. . the stand–up comedian I like because he's loose, he talks about whatever he feels like."[33] There are currently only about a dozen or so regularly working Asian American comedians in the country. Tony, the protagonist of Rosanne Alfaro's

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play "The Cowboy Samurai," expresses the angst of being one of the few Asian American comedians: "it's not easy being an Asian American comedian. How many of us are there in the whole country, five?"[34]

A few more Asian American standup comedians such as Margaret Cho, Henry Cho, and Tamayo Otsuki gained national prominence in the nineteen-nineties. Others such as Al Manalo, Kevin Kataoka, Tessie Chua, Bob Kabuta, Mike Moto, or Phil Nee are known primarily among Asian Americans.[35] The first television situation comedy to feature an Asian American family "All American Girl" aired in 1994-1995.[36] Multiracial Asian identities remain for the most part invisible or subsumed within mono-ethnic Asian American identities. One exception are Filipino American comedians who distinguish Filipino identity as historically comprised of multiple racial and cultural heritages.

Integrated and Multicultural Comedy

Evolving from a context of ethnic integration is the emergence of integrated and multicultural comedy that appeals to multiethnic audiences. Rather than a militant or oppositional "us" versus "them" approach of attack comedy, integrated comedy includes peoples from

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different ethnic groups as equitable participants in the humor. In addition to promoting cultural affirmation, integrated comedy emphasizes crosscultural perspectives.

African-American comedians in the 1950s such as Timmie Rogers, Nipsey Russell, and Slappy White, helped to integrate previously segregated audiences by providing humor that both black and white audiences could appreciate. As Mel Watkins writes they had found a way to "defuse the racial hostility and entrenched `us' versus `them' syndrome that characterized traditional black-white relationships in America. Watkins explains that for black comedians to appeal to integrated audiences, "the audience had to be included in the joking process to the extent that a shared viewpoint regarding the object of the joke was established. An `integrated joke' is finally one in which, momentarily at least, black comic and white audience function in an equitable `we relationship--one that not only shatters the image of the naive Negro stage comic but also includes non-blacks in the humor--instead of, as in much black circuit comedy, excluding whites by either focusing on inside humor or making them the object of the joke." (495) Integrative comedy marked a major shift in American ethnic humor by providing material that had interrethnic appeal. It takes more skill to do ethnic humor that does not offend people. As Lily Tomlin noted about stage comedy in

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general, `the best material . . . makes a comment without ridiculing and includes everyone in the comment.'" (495-6)[37]

Dick Gregory was one of the first comedians who did integrated humor who attained national prominence. Gregory made a conscious attempt to resolve the racial tensions of white audiences. Gregory resolved white anxieties about race relations with a joke about the NAACP's request to buy a lifetime membership: "Told them I'd pay a week at a time. Hell of a thing to buy a lifetime membership, wake up one morning and find the country's been integrated". He followed this with "wouldn't it be a hell of a thing if all this was burnt cork and you people were being tolerant for nothing?"[38] Gregory helped white audiences laugh at their own racial anxieties. In another narrative Gregory provides a response to restaurants that served whites only:

> Last time I was down South I walked into this restaurant, and this white waitress came up to me and said: "We don't serve colored people here."
>
> I said: "That's all right, I don't eat colored people. Bring me a whole fried chicken."
>
> About that time these three cousins come in, you know the ones I mean, Klu, Kluck, and Klan, and they say:

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"Boy, we're givin' you fair warnin'. Anything you do to that chicken, we're gonna do to you." So I put down my knife and fork, and I picked up that chicken, and I kissed it.[39]

Gregory further opened the way for other African American comedians such as Richard Pryor and Godfrey Cambridge to successfully present racial commentary to white audiences. The most successful of black comedians, Richard Pryor played a significant role in the 1960s and 1970s by making African-American humor popular in the mass media. Their success was a major breakthrough for integrated humor. As Watkins writes "it was a crucial breakthrough, not only in the public expression of genuine African-American humor, but also in forthright communication between the races." (527)

Aspiring to the sentiments of integrated humor, the Ohanna Cultural Center's "Color of Funny" Annual Comedy Competition which began in 1989 in Oakland promotes multicultural comedy that dispels stereotypes and is culturally informative. The Ohanna Competition provides an alternative to comedy clubs dominated by white male managers and comedians. Filipino American comedian and comedy producer Al Manalo came up with the idea of the

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multicultural comedy series as a way to promote comedians of diverse backgrounds who do culturally affirmative cross-cultural humor. The goals of the competition are to explore the use of ethnic humor in standup comedy as a means "to provide positive, informative, cross-cultural experiences that increase people's understanding of themselves and the multicultural world in which they live. "Through standup comedy we can begin to correct the misinformation that contributes to the racial strife and disharmony in our community."[40]

Similar to counterculture humor, much of multicultural comedy provides critiques dominant ethnic misconceptions. In addition, in multicultural comedy there is an emphasis on providing affirmative information from minority experiences that integrated audiences can appreciate.

However, the broadcast media has not promoted the type of culturally diverse comedy being performed at the "Color of Funny" Competition. The type of humor promoted by the Color of Funny falls inbetween the regular television programming which promotes mainstream humor, and the cable stations that promote underground humor. Sullivan believes that television programmers may be afraid of the cultural diversity represented by the type of humor promoted by the Color of Funny: "I think because of the cultural diversity, the

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media is still afraid of that, but I don't know why . . . It's not like it hasn't been seen or is not available."

Contemporary Multiracial Comedy

Many of the sentiments that led to the marginalization of mixed race identity in minstrel shows still hinder comedians of today. When I asked people why there are so few comedians who express multiethnic/racial identities, respondents made statements such as the following:

> Isn't it still somewhat in the realm of the taboo? . . . I think it would be harder for a black/white multiracial/ethnic comedian to succeed than it would be for any other "mixture". The very thought of miscegenation or "race mixing" is still so unsettling to many people, that this comedian would really be walking on thin ice.
>
> -Charles M. Byrd, 1996

Reflecting how "race mixing" is still unsettling to many people, many of the comedians I interviewed say they have been verbally and

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even physically harassed or attacked for expressing multiethnic identities or perspectives. Chicano comedian Jose Simon told me a particularly dramatic encounter he experienced. Simon presents himself as both Mexican and American with jokes such as "I pronounce my name Jose Simon [Seemone] unless I'm looking for a job--then it's Joe Simon." During a performance in Idaho, Simon was assailed with racial slurs such as "Spic" and "Beaner" and had a full shot of tequila smashed against his face--glass and all. After the show he was met in the parking lot by two guys with a shotgun who told him he "better get the hell outa' town" or else they would shoot him. Then the town sheriff showed up and told him to get in the police car so he could take him to his hotel to get his belongings and then drop him off at the airport "`cuzz these guys mean business'". Simon says he will never perform in Idaho again because "it's not worth it . . . I value my life too much." Some comedians believe racial politics in the nineteen nineties have become regressively more conservative and hostile towards racial differences including mixed race identities.

Other comedians say that because of "political correctness" it is an advantage to be from more than one ethnic group since it is generally acceptable to make fun of groups that you belong to. Oakland comedy club manager Rick Sullivan says we are starting to

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see more mixed race comedy because society is starting to accept the idea that mixed race people exist.

In contrast to mainland racial tensions, the socio-political context of Hawaii where a large proportion of the population acknowledges mixed descent provides an exceptionally positive site for the affirmation of mixed race identities. Mixed race identities have become a commodity in comedy in due to a tourist-based economy where multiethnicity is symbolic of Hawaii as a multiethnic "paradise" or "salad bowl" society.[41]

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Endnotes

[1] Michael Rogin Blackface/White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

[2]Smith xi.

[3] Patricia Morton Disfigured Images: The Historical Assault on Afro-American Women (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991).

[4] Michael Rogin, Blackface/White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot (California: University of California, 1996); Eric Lott, Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class (New York: 1993):6-12.; Eric Ledell Smith Bert Williams: A Biography of the Pioneer Black Comedian (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 1992) 11. Rogin 34.

[5] Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays (Ed.) Michael Holquist (Trans.) Caryl Everson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Austin Press, 1981).

[6]Barbara Christian Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition: 1892-1976 (New York: Pergamon Press, 1985).

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[7](Lott 1993):3.

[8] Naomi Zack, Race and Mixed Race (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1993):113-127.

[9]Toll, Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Ninetenth Century America (New York: Oxford Univesity Press, 1974): 54.

[10]Rogin (1996): 37.

[11] William J. Scheick The Half-Blood: A Cultural Symbol in 19th-Century American Fiction (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1979).

[12]Freda Scot Giles, "From Melodrama to the Movies: The Tragic Mulatto as a Type Character," In Naomi Zack (ed.) American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995): 64. For a discussion of shifting portrayals of the mixed blood of Native American descent, see William J. Scheick, The Half-Blood: A Cultural Symbol in 19th Century America (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1979 Will Rogers' World: America's Foremost Political Humorist Comments on the 20s and 30s--and 80s and 90s (New York: M. Evans and Co., 1989).

[12]See Guillermo E. Hernandez Chicano Satire: A Study in Chicano Literary Culture (Austin: University of Texas, 1991).

[13] Darby Li Po Price "Mixed Laughter: Humorous Identities,

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Experiences, and Perspectives Among Multiethnic Comedians" In Paul Spickard and Jeffry Burroghs (Eds.) We Are a People: Narrative and Multiplicity in the Construction of Ethnic Identity (Temple University Press, 1998).

[14]David Marc Comic Visions: Television Comedy and American Culture (Massachusetts: Unwin Hyman, 1992).

[15] William J. Scheik The Half-Blood: A Cultural Symbol in 19th-Century American Fiction (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1979).

[16]Bryan B. Sterling and Frances N. Sterling, Will Rogers' World: America's Foremost Political Humorist Comments on the 20s and 30s--and 80s and 90s (New York: M. Evans and Co., 1989).

[17]Bryan B. Sterling, and Frances N. Sterling, Will Rogers' World: America's Foremost Political Humorist Comments on the 20s and 30s--and 80s and 90s, (New York: M. Evans and Company, 1989).

[18]In Darrell Y. Hamamoto Monitored Peril: Asian Americans and the Politics of TV Representation (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 1994):241.

[19] Hamamoto (1994): 241-242.

[20] Gerard Jones Honey, I'm Home! Sitcoms: Selling the American Dream (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1992).

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[21] Nervous Laughter: Television Situation Comedy and Liberal Democracy (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1989).

[22]See Guillermo E. Hernandez Chicano Satire: A Study in Literary Culture (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991).

[23] Allen L. Woll "Bandits and Lovers: Hispanic Images in American Film" In Miller The Kaleidoscopic Lens (1980):54-72.

[24] The designation Latino includes peoples of Latin American descent.

[25] Valerie Menard "Tickled Brown" Hispanic July/August 1997: 18-24.

[26] Historian/journalist Bret Harte wrote of the Chinese in California in Ah Sin (1877) "they seldom smile, and their laughter is of such an extraordinary and sardonic nature--so purely a mechanical spasm, quite independent of any mirthful attribute--that to this day I am doubtful whether I ever saw a Chinaman laugh." In James S. Moy Marginal Sights: Staging the Chinese in America (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1993):28.

[27]In 1994 I asked a number of people in Boston why we don't see very many Asian American comedians on TV. Answers ranged from "we see them as serious hard working, studious people," "maybe humor is not valued in their culture," and "they can't talk right so they can't tell no funny jokes" to "because they don't have a sense of humorAssertions that people of Asian descent "can't tell no funny

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jokes" feed stereotypical beliefs that Asians are incompetent in a range of activities: from not being able to speak properly, drive correctly, to not being socially well rounded enough to be considered competent enough for high level managerial positions.

[28]Dorinne Kondo writes "like so many people on the margins, Asian Americans are generally erased from realms of cultural representation." Dorinne Kondo, "Bad Girls: Theater, Women of Color, and the Politics of Representation," in (Eds.) Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon Women Writing Culture (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995): 49-64

[29] Richard Oehling "The Yellow Menace: Asian Images in American Film" in Randall Miller (Ed.) The Kaleidoscopic Lens: How Hollywood Views Ethnic Groups (United States: Jerome Ozer, 1980):182-206.

[30] See James S. Moy Marginal Sights: Staging the Chinese in America (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1993).

[31] Frank Chin "Interview: Roland Winters" Amerasia Journal 2 Fall 1973: 1-19.

[32] Harry Tamura "Pat Morita" Jade 1982: 13, 42-44.

[33] Lane Nishikawa live performance and interview 1994.

[34] Rosanne Alfaro "The Cowboy Samurai" live performance, 1994.

[35]Observing the recent emergence of Kevin Kataoka and other Asian

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American comedians, Asian Week columnist Bill Wong writes "the very fact that he, Cho, Manalo, and other Asian Americans are comedians defies stereotypes."

[36] For a critical analysis of "All American Girl" see Darby Li Po Price "'All American Girl' and the American Dream" Critical Mass: A Journal of Asian American Cultural Criticism 2:1 (1994): 129-146.

[37]Mel Watkins, On the Real Side: Laughing, Lying, and Signifying--the Underground Tradition of African-American Humor That Transformed American Culture, from Slavery to Richard Pryor, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994).

[38]In Watkins, 496.

[39]In Watkins, 497.

[40]Ohana Cultural Center, "Description of the Event" flyer, 1991. Also, personal interviews with organizers Al Manalo and Karen Chin April. 12, 1992.

[41]Darby Li Po Price "Mixed Race as Commodity in Comedy in Hawaii" In Teresa Kay Williams and Cynthia Nakashima (Eds.) Reconfiguring Race, Reconceptualizing Ethnicity: Multiraciality in Asian America (Temple University Press, forthcoming 1998).

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CHAPTER THREE

COMIC MULATTOES AND MULATTAS

> I think it would be harder for a black/white multiracial/ethnic comedian to succeed than it would be for any other "mixture." The very thought of miscegenation or "race mixing" is still so unsettling to many people, that this comedian would really be walking on thin ice. . . it would be a tremendous affront to white male racists, and the comedian should go for it anyway!
>
> Charles Byrd

The color line between the "black" and "white" races begins with slavery based on race which became fully instituted in the British colonies around 1660 (Kawash viii). The color line has continued into the present in the guise of segregation, anti-miscegenation, and structuring society along distinct racial categories. The figure of the tragic mulatto with an inevitable downfall has been used in popular culture as an example to bolster arguments against miscegenation resulting in offspring with identities which don't clearly fit into racial categories. Regarding the denial of miscegenation as an impediment to the discovery of the African

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American past, Ishmael Reed writes in Airing Dirty Laundry (1994) "the thorniest impediment to the discovery of the black past is southern denial. The inablitity of some southerners, not only layment but academicians, to face the fact of miscegenation is such an explosive issue that this word, which simply means "mix," has taken on a sinister meaning" (268). This chapter analyzes the contexts, texts, and responses to attempts of comedy writers and comedians of multiracial African descent to assert hybrid identities, interracial sexuality, and integration.

Literary comedy

Dramatic portrayals of the mulattas and mulattoes as tragic figures dominate literature by both African American and Euro-American writers (Sollors 1997). African American writers have overwhelmingly chosen tragedy over comedy in attempts to dramatize the plight of blacks in America, and also to present black culture in a middle-class rather than folk style. The African American aversion to portrayals of blacks as comic was partially a reactionary attempt to counter the tradition of blackface which featured blacks as comic buffoons.

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Early African American writers such as Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston whose down-to-earth characters use idiomatic folk humor and comedy to represent black culture have been accused of perpetuating crude stereotypes of blacks by middle class black writers who sought more "respectable" or "cultured" portrayals. Richard Wright criticized Hurston's Their Eyes were Watching God (1937) "Hurston voluntarily continues in her novel the tradition which was forced upon the Negro in the theater, that is the minstrel techinique that makes the white folks laugh" (In Nichols 456). Such aversion to folk humor was particularly noticeable in the status-conscious racial politics of race during the 1960s which found little humor in broad portrayals of comic African American characters (Bass 3-4).

However, others defend and advocate the use of ethnic humor, especially in the form of satire, as a central means of countering mainstream sensibilities. According to Reed American ethnic literature might be divided between the assimilationist tradition which advocates "assimilation" into "white mainstream values" on the one hand, and the "satirical `trickster' tradition" that undermines and mocks assimilationists (154). A few early African American comedy writers used mixed race characters as a means to mediate the color line through satire. The mulatto as a comic figure takes the form of a

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trickster figure able to transgress the color line and other societal expectations.

James Weldon Johnson's The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man (1912) was one of the few novels of the early twentieth-century that, as Mel Watkins notes, "treated the passing theme with some humor and ironic distance" (Watkins 411). James Weldon Johnson, who had collaborated with his brother Rosamund in writing theatrical comedies, disclosed his comic intent by having the un-named narrator announce in the first paragraph "I know that I am playing with fire, and I feel the thrill which accompanies that most fascinating pastime; and, back of it all, I think I find a sort of savage and diabolical desrie to gather up all the little tragedies of my life, and turn them into a practical joke on society" (Johnson 3; Watkins 411). After the narrator passes into white society he exclaimes "when I returned to my room atfer an enjoyable evening, I laughed heartily over what struck me as the capital joke I was playing" (Johnson 197; Watkins 411). According to Johnson some aspects of the race question were "so absurd that they cannot be effictively treated except in a satirical method" (In Watkins 413).

Langston Hughes was a leading humorist of the Harlem Black Renaissance. Jesse B. Simple, his most popular character, was feature in his comedy play "Simply Heavenly" (1953) and his Chicago

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Defender newspaper column which was Hughes' "social protest mouthpeice" which enabled him to provide much satire on the race problem. (Watkins 422). With an unadorned street dialect and full acceptance of his outcast position in American society, Simple was a Socratic style clown used to represent the unassimilated black in contrast and contradiction to the more reserved middle-class narrator and white society.

Simple addressed the issue of miscegenation in "Race Relations" when he complained that race relations committes were missing the point by concetrating exclusively on voting rights and job security: "I always thought relations meant being related . . . but I don't hear nobody speaking aout us being kinfolks." When the narrator says equal rights have nothing to do with intermarriage, a subject which offends the South, Simple insists they do and asserts that the South has done more "relating" than anybody else. When the narrator insists that race relations have nothing to do with "that kind of relating" Simple insists "If they don't .... they are not relations." The narrator responds "absurd . . .we are not talking about the same thing at all . . . I am talking about fair employment, and you are talking about . . . " "Race relations" Simple responds. (In Watkins 422). Johnson emphasizes that race relations involving interracial sexual relations are a central civil rights issue.

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Mixed race is recognized as a controversial issue of civil rights with sometimes dangerous consequences for those who assert the issue. Redd Fox jokes:

> In the early days, Malcolm hated what he called the white devil . . . Then he realized that we were all different shades of the same stick. The motherfucker got killed for it. (In Pryor 98).

Crossing Racial Lines on Stage

The rules of hypodescent and white aversion to black male sexuality discouraged early African American comedians from asserting multiracial identities. Early black comedians such as Bert Williams or Richard Pryor rarely expressed their mixed heritages in their routines. However, in their personal lives neither comedians initially thought of themselves as black and resented being classified as such.

Williams was born in the 1870s in the West Indies and performed at a time when it was unacceptable for mulattoes to perform comic roles. Black comedians performing for white audiences had to wear blackface to emphasize their blackness to the

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point of a comic caricature. Having spent his early years in the West Indies as a person of 1/16th African ancestry, Williams did not realize a black identity until he moved to the States. He didn't like being labelled and discrimated against as a black in America, and resented being forced to wear blackface. His wife similarly hated his having to wear burnt cork and white gloves because "it hid his humanity . . .he became a clown; by removing them after a show he was able to regain his personal dignity." (Ferguson 14)

Jessie Fauset explains as "a Jamaican by birth; the ways of the American Negro were utterly alien to him and did not come spontaneously . . . the pursuit took him years, but at length he was able to portray for us not only that `typical Negro' which the white world thinks is universal but also the special types of given districts and localities with their own peculiar foibles of walk and speech and jargon" (Fauset 447). Williams was limited by dominant racial conventions to a narrow set of black characters. "He might portray black people along the gamut from roustablout to unctuous bishop. But he must never stray beyond those limits" (Fausett 447).

Such restriction to his freedom of expression on the stage contributed to William's deeply sad and hopeless frustration. W. C. Fields referred to Williams as "the funniest man I ever saw and the saddest man I ever knew" (Fauset 448). None-the-less, by adopting

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a hard-luck personage who made light of his troubles, (as blackface comedian Ernest Hogan did in the1890s (Fauset 446), Williams went beyond the figure of the merely funny happy-go-lucky black buffoon figure of the blackface tradition. Though necessarily subordinate to the confines of dominant racial restrictions Williams introduced with the element of folk comedy some element of reality which paved the way for greater freedom of expression for future black comedians.

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s created a cultural space for comedians to share African American viewpoints with mainstream Euro-American and multiethnic audiences. Such early crossover comedians risked offending non-black audiences. Dick Gregory recalls in his autobiographical Nigger (1964) how as a black comedian performing for the first time in1960 in Chicago for a white audience at the American Guild of Variety Artists: "I've got to act like a star who isn't sorry for himself--that way, they can't feel sorry for me. I've got to make jokes about myself, before I can make jokes about them and their society--that way, they can't hate me. Comedy is friendly relations (Gregory 132).

Gregory opened with "Just my luck, bought a suit with two pair of pants today . . . burnt a hole in the jacket." After making fun of himself he acknowleged racial divisions: "They asked me to buy a lifetime membership in the NAACP, but I told them I'd pay a week at

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a time. Hell of a thing to buy a lifetime membership, wake up one morning and find the country's been integrated" (Gregory 132). Gregory then poked fun at the audience: "Wouldn't it be a hell of a thing if all this was burnt cork and you people were being tolerant for nothing?" (Gregory, 132).

Having made light of himself, the racial situation, and the audience, Gregory felt he could ridicule segregation:

> Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I understand there are a good many Southerners in the room tonight. I know the South very well. I spent twenty years there one night. . . .
>
> It's dangerous for me to go back. You see, when I drink I think I'm Polish. One night I got so drunk I moved out of my own neighborhood. . .
>
> Last time I was down South I walked into this restaurant, and this waitress came up to me and said: "We don't serve colored people here."
>
> I said: "That's all right, I don't eat colored people. Bring me a whole fired chicken."
>
> About that time these three cousins come in, you know the ones I mean, Klu, Kluck, and Klan, and they say:

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> "Boy, we're givin' you fair warnin'. Anything you do to that chicken, we're gonna do to you." About then the waitress brought me my chicken. "Remember, boy, anything you do to that chicken, we're gonna do to you." So I put down my knife and fork, and I picked up that chicken, and I kissed it. (144).

Gregory believed he had the freedom to express whatever political satire he wanted to as long as he stayed away from explicitly sexual material, referred to by comics as "blue" material.

> Stay away from sex, that's the big pitfall. If you use blue material only, you slip backinto being that Negro stereotype comic. If you mix blue and topical satire that white customer, all hung up with the Negro sex mystique, is going to get uncomfortable. (Gregory 133)

It wasn't until much later in his career that he was comfortable using sexually suggestive jokes such as the one about a white man in a white suburb who sees a black man cutting the lawn of the house next door and asks "what do you get for doing yardwork?" and the

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black man responds "I get to sleep with the lady of the house. You need any help?" (Watkins 499).

Early crossover comedians were usually reserved in the language they used in addressing miscegenation. Such jokes often contrived absurd interactions between animal characters to metaphorically critique racial relations. For example, during the Moms Mabley, the most popular black female comedian during the1960s, joked about a trick she played as a child one Easter by switching the family hens' white eggs with colored eggs:

> I had a whole lot of different colored eggs. We had an old setting hen around the house, and I went and took all the eggs from under her and put all these different colored eggs under her and she hatched them. Hatched out a whole lot of red, green, blue, purple, orange chickens. The rooster came and saw all those different colored chickens. He got down on his knees, but he didn't hurt the hen though. But man he went around the house and damn near killed that peacock. (Mabley 1961)

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This satire ridicules white male (the rooster) hatred towards black men (the peacock) as sexual threats to white racial purity (white eggs) and white womanhood (the hen).

While early black crossover comedians were necessarily reserved or tacit in expressing their views on race, they exposed white and mixed audiences to black sensibilities which, in turn, opened the way for more recent comedians to explicitly express their personal views, observations, and experiences of race.

Richard Pryor became infamous for his graphic transgression of interracial sexual taboos. He was born in Peoria Illinois in1940 of a black father and a New Orleans Creole mother. Pryor didn't want to be classified as "colored" or a "nigger" when he was a kid: "I didn't even know I had a color . . . *I always wanted to be something other than a nigger, because niggers had it so rough*:." In an attempt to avoid being "colored" he decided he was "orange," the color of the sun and nicknamed himself Sun: "In my imagination, I gave myself a new identity. I called myself Sun the Secret Prince. As Sun the Secret Prince, I was colorless. I was just light and energy, carooning off the planets. No boundaries. Simply alive." When a white teacher told him firmly he was a "negro" Pryor responded "but I'm orange; do I have to be a Negro?" (Haskins 10).

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On his 1960 TV debut on Rudy Vallee's variety show "On Broadway Tonight" Pryor introduced himself with

> I'm not a New Yorker. My home is Peoria, Illinois. I had a wild neighborhood, I gotta tell you. Because my mother's Puerto Rican, my father's a Negro, and we lived in a big Jewish tenement building--in an Italian neighborhood.
>
> So everytime I went ouside, they'd yell, "Get him! He's all of them!" (Pryor 74)

Seeking the commercial reward of appealing to mainstream audiences, Pryor patterned himself after the mild mannered Bill Cosby during the 1960s and early 1970s. However, in the mid1970s Pryor's standup became more representative of the black underclass from which he had grown up in. Donald Bogle refers to his 1970s persona as that of a "foul-mouthed, iconoclastic wild man, the Crazy Nigger, who spoke in the language and ideom of the streets" (Bogle 259). Pryor expressed his perspectives as a black man who grow up poor with a mother who ran a whorehouse:

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> Tricks used to come through our neighborhood. That's where I first me white people. They came down to our neighborhood and helped the econoomy. I could've been a bigot, you know what I mean? I could've been prejudiced. I met nice white men. They said, "Hello, little boy. Is your mother home? I'd like a blow job."
>
> I wonder what would happen if niggers went to white neighborhoods doing that shit. "Hey, man, your mama home? Tell the bitch we want to fuck!" (35).

Pryor joked about criticism he received from black women for dating white women: Sisters look at you like you killed your mama when you're out with a white woman. Why should you be happy? (154).

Interracial Sexuality On Screen

Becoming a national success, Pryor was given the opportunity to became one of the major black actors of the 1970s. Cast in supporting roles numerous movies including "Adios Amigo" (1975), "Car Wash" (1976), and "Silver Streak" (1976), black audiences "loved" Pryor's black cultural style and speech--"their dude Richie, *a brother*--had now *made it*" (Bogle 262). Pryor was able to express some black male attitude and sexuality as a film actor, notably

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in"Silver Streak" when he asks a white man "Is that your lady, man?" and exclaims "She's somethin' else. Stand up, mama. Let me get a look at you. Hum, hum, hum. *Have mercy!*" (Bogle 263). Then when the white man angrily screams "you ignorant nigger!" he responds

> Who you calling nigger? You don't know me well enough to call me no nigger. I'll slap the taste out your mouth.

Pryor's aggressive expression of black masculinity was allowed in his supporting roles as a comic sidekick to more "uptight" white male stars. Bogle refers to Pryor's role as a sidekick to white men as the "very old theme: the Huck-Finn fixation" about a white male and a black male bonding which was used to say "there was no such thing as true racial divisions" (263), partially to counter a black movement seeking acknowledgement of the historical segregation and oppression of blacks by whites.

However, Pryor's sexual expression as the star of his own show "The Richard Pryor Show" (1977) was censored by the Broadcast Standards division of the Federal Communications Commission. They cancelled his first introductory spoof on himself which had a shot of Pryor, nude from the waist up, saying "I have given up nothing inorder to do a television program". The next camera shot would

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have panned a long shot of Pryor as an apparently naked host whose flesh-colored body suit gave the impression that he had in fact been castrated (Haskins 145).

In another sketch a man introduces Pryor with "Richard was born in Peoria, Illinois, where half the kids in town call him superstar. The other half call him daddy." Then a woman announces "He's raised alot of money for needy students. In fact, he's paid half the girls at Hollywood high School to keep their mouths shut." Sandra Bernhard adds

> I dated Richard for awhile, but I wasn't his type. I wasn't beautiful, I wasn't sexy, I wasn't white. . .
>
> Richard has settled down and become a real family man. In fact he's given everything he has to his children: A flat nose and big lips.

In another skit Pryor played the first black president of the United States. Upon being asked at a press conference if he intend to continue to see white women he revealed the strain of such a touchy subject and responded "As long as I can keep it up . . . Why do you think it's called the White House?" (158). NBC cancelled the series after its fifth week due to "low ratings."

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Pryor's trip to Africa led to a desire to be more inclusive in his comedy. "Even black ain't beautiful if it's the only color you look at every day. Life's richness, its beauty and excitement, come from the diversity of things." Pryor "no longer wanted to be someone who pointed out the differences--especially racial ones":

> I wanted to help people see how similar all of us are . . . We're all just people. We're all the same.
>
> "What else I found out in Africa is the fact that aside from us being from the orignial people, so are the white people.
>
> We all family.
>
> That's it, Jack. And fuck all that other shit. `Cause it don't mean nothing except about some cash (Pryor 176).

Pryor attempted to quit using the word "nigger" in his standup but people reacted negatively. Critics thought he'd "gone soft, sold out, turned my back on the cause, and all that political, militant shit. I received death threats. Kooks showed up at my house, threw shit over the gate":

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They wanted my voice to be theirs.

And they didn't want mine to change.

But I wasn't Malcolm, Martin, or anybody else. . . I'd wanted laughs, not racial struggles (177).

During the 1980s Pryor's movie and standup personas became more domesticated. Bogle writes of his role in "Bustin' Loose" (1981) which Pryor co-produced: "this congenial film, like several earlier ones, domesticates Pryor; it tames those uncrontrollable spirits, those nasty urges, those foul imaginings in order to make one believe he's just like us, an ordinary, kind of wild but basically humble guy" (277). In movies of the late1980s "the man who had once spoken for America's underclass" was "now removed entirely from that class structure . . . audiences wondered why he selected such trash" (Bogel 280). Comedians who do not cater to the desires or expectations of their audiences often encounter negative responses. Black sexuality, miscegenation and mixed race identity remain risky issues for comedians in the 1990s.

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After Whoopi Goldberg's success of her one woman show Whoopi she secured numerous acting roles in Hollywood films. Whoopi Goldberg became the only black woman of the late 1980s to star in Hollywood films (Bogle297). While black comedy actors such as Pryor or Eddie Murphy were cast as "cool" black dudes, Golberg was routinely cast as a racially ambiguous, absurdly dressed, and defeminized woman, and because she continually starred as an ethnically understated counterpart to white actors she remained removed from the black community. Donald Bogle writes "films, however, usually treated her as an oddity, never placing her within a cultural context with which a black audience could identify" (Bogle 297). Audiences blamed Golberg personally for her roles rather than the producers or screenwriters.

In the nineties, beginning with her role in Ghost (1990) Golberg began doing roles with black cultural language and inflections which ethnicized her characters. However, the scripts did not call for interracial sexual relations between Golberg and her white co-stars. Ghost suggested miscegenation when the white female lead is able to make love to the spirit of her deceased white boyfriend through Goldberg's body. However, during the love scene Golberg is visually transformed into the white man.

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In Made in America (1993) Golberg discovers her child is half white through artificial insemination (not interracial sex) by white male co-star Ted Dansen (her real-life boyfriend). Their romantic attraction turns into a comic fiasco and romp through town. Finally, it turns out Dansen was not the donor after all. The film consistently suggests but thwarts interracial sexual relations. Bogle writes "Does the audience need any clearer statement that the races should not mix? Even the major ads for the film depict Goldberg and Danson apart; she stands on one side; he, on the other" (333).

Following the release of the movie, Goldberg and Danson received hate male denouncing their real-life interracial relationship.

Interracial Roast

Goldberg's 1993 attempt to embarass Dansen at the annual Friar's Club Roast[i] in New York City became the focus of controversey over Whoopi's script in which Dansen's wore blackface, engaged in interracial jokes about their sex life, and repeatedly used the word "nigger". The event was sensationalized accross the nation in newspaper and magazine headlines such as "Ted Danson's Shocking Jokes About Whoopi: Find out why celebs walked out of a party in disgust" (Globe Oct 26, 1993) and "Ted Dansen Goes Nuts: He begs

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wife `Take me back'--then puts on blackface to tell Whoopi `I love you'" (National Enquirer Oct. 26, 1993.

The Globe (1993) wrote "Most of Ted's jokes are too disgusting and offensive--especially to African Americans--to be repeated in a family newspaper. But we feel the public has a right to know some of the details. So here they are:"

> Joke #1: Ted opened by saying: "I was wondering what to talk about at this roast the other morning while shaving. There I was, and their (Whoopi) was down on her knees (committing a sexual act)."
>
> Joke #2: Ted told how he'd taken Whoopi to meet his parents for the first time:
>
> "I was very nervous because my parents can be so stuffy and out-of-touch," he said.
>
> "But after Whoopi did the laundry and finished cleaning up, I could tell my dad had warmed up to her because he offered to drop her off at the bus stop."
>
> Joke #3: I was told the mayor's coming, so be careful--don't do political jokes. Just do n***** jokes."

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Joke #4: "What's black and stutters?" The answer involves a well-known racial epithet.

Joke#5 "Two (blacks) work all summer long picking cotton, then take their savings into a whorehoulse determined to fill their deepest wish--to (make love to) a white woman. The mad offers them a choice between a 16-year-old blonde virgin and, as a joke, a toothless crone in her 70s. To the madam's amazement, both me want the old lady and argue to the point of pulling knives on each other. `Hold it,' says the madam. `Both whores are white so why (do you want" the old lady?' `Yo right, theys both white," say the black men. `But dang . . . she done been white longer!'"

Joke #6: Ted told the crowd that his dad caught him and Whoopi making love. He said his father warned him to make sure that they didn't have a mixed-race baby--because every time a black child gets diarrhea, it thinks it's melting.

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Their explicit descriptions of interracial sex, racial slurs, and "nigger jokes" ofended some people, and brought praise from others. Some left the performance in disgust. New York Mayor David Dinkins said the jokes "were pretty vulgar and many were way, way over the line." Talk show host Montel Williams told reporters "When Ted made the jokes about the racially mixed kids, and everyone knows my wife is white and just gave birth to our child, I could see my wife start to cry." Resigning from the Friar's club, Williams wrote "I was confused as to whether or not I was at a Friars event or at a rally for the KKK and Aryan Nation."[ii] Popular media turned the event into a national controversey.

Golberg said that the display was all part of a carefully calculated spoof in reaction to hate mail opposed to their interracial romance. Goldberg has received mail that say "I hope if you and Ted Danson have babies, I hope they die." Dansen has received letters addressing him as "Dear Nigger-lover." Dansen said "it's something that we've thought a lot about and planned for a very long time. It was our way of retaliating."

Beverly Johnson, a crusader for African-American women defended them "I'm shocked that anyone could miss the obvious humor . . . I was in stiches. These are two people who are really in

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love with each other--and they showed the world that all boundaries are down."[iii] Goldberg claimed there was too much love behind his words to be racist. Comedian Billy Crystal complimented Golberg: "Looking at you is proof that Buster Douglas and Bob Marley had a child!"

Candy Mills, editor of Interrace Magazine wrote in defense: "I understand Mayor Dinkins public outcry over Danson's "nigger" jokes and appearance in blackface. He is a politician. He *has* to be politically correct. I am surprised, however, that Montel Williams was offended."[iv] After criticizing Williams for continually sensationalizing negative aspects and making a mockery of interracial couples on his show, Mills asks

> why do we only condemn Whites who use the word "nigger" in jest and not Black comedians, like Eddie Murphy, who regularly use that word in their stand-up comedy acts in addition to their "whitey" jokes . . . If Danson were Black, this incident would not have made front-page news." "Danson's racially peppered comments and "blackface" may have been tasteless and crude but never once was he vindicative or spiteful (i.e., racist). his use of the word "nigger" (in jest) does not reflect his

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> beliefs and feelings. . . Black director Spike Lee has called White women who marry Black men "ugly mugglies" and in his interracial sex film, *Jungle Fever*, the Black lead character says to his White lover, "No-no-no. No half-black, half-white, mulatto kids for me. They grow up to be mixed nuts." Montel Williams and Mayor David Dinkens, where were you then when we really needed you?

Williams conceded "I don't believe he or Whoopi Goldberg meant to be offensive to anyone. . . In leaving, I simply followed my conscience."[v]

The anger and controversey provoked by Dansen and Golberg's interracial roast illustrate that race still greatly matters to many people in America. While some people are comfortable saying and hearing this type of explicity sexual interracial humor, others may consider such jokes to be no laughing matter. Danson said he felt the incident was socially constructive because it sparked a dialogue about racism. He concludes "I'm proud of what I did. I'm also proud I had the fortitude to do this. We are a racist nation. It's time maybe we started talking"[vi]

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Hybrid Identities in the '90s

> Mulattoes were portrayed as tragic because mainstream society was concerned about miscegenation. Comedians have progressed to the point where some can make fun of it. Mel Watkins[vii]

Born as Caryn Johnson in New York City (c. 1950) Whoopi Goldberg took the name Whoopi from the movie Whoopi in which stars blackface comedian Eddie Cantor, and Goldberg as a way to assert her Jewish heritage. Controversey has arisen over Whoopi Golberg's ambiguous racial identity as well as interracial relationship with white actor Ted Dansen. Goldberg considers herself to be of African, Jewish, Seminole Indian, white, and Chinese ancestry and an "American" rather than an African American.

> I am not an African American. I'm not from Africa. I'm from New York. My roots run a whole lot deeper than most of the people who don't have anything in front of the word American. I can trace my family tree back to the *Mayflower*. We may not have been on it, beut we

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> were under it, and that counts too. We're out of Florida, for the most part. We're Seminole Indians. We're a couple Jews from Russia. We're black and white. There's even some Chinese running through my blood. . . I'm a mutt. There's a whole historical adventure that belongs to me, and I refuse to let our cultural demagogues rob me of what's mine. (Golberg 106)

Despite Goldberg's insistance that she is multiethnic rather than African American, most people view her as African American or black rather than multiracial/ethnic or any of her other heritages. Blacks have criticized her for attempting to pass as white or non black. Jews viewing her as black rather than Jewish have criticized Golberg for making jokes about Jews by Jews. While Goldberg has been condemned for asserting her non-African heritages by many, others commend her for asserting her multiethnicity.

Comedian Deborah Swisher of African and Jewish descent was inspired by Goldberg to become a comedian herself 1987. Swisher explains in an interview she was inspired by Goldberg and Sandra Bernhard (12):

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> Swisher: I was inspired by Whoopi Goldberg to do stand-up. Whoopi Goldberg! Sandra Bernhard! I wish a baby could be created by those two women.
>
> Jamoo: And that would be Deborah!
>
> Swisher: Yeah, it would be me because I'm not black and I'm not white. I'm real bizarre and I like being over the top and taking chances . . . My mother is white and Jewish. My father is Black and American Indian.

Shwisher says her favorite material is true and about herself. "It lets the audience know who I am and I'm proud to talk about it." She breaks the tension by opening with

> I'm in a good mood, well for a Jewish girl. I'm actually Black and Jewish so come on baby, light my mynora! I'm Black, Jewish and a woman, so every joke offends me.

Juxtaposing stereotypical qualities, Swisher jokes

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> Black and Jewish that makes me Negrewish. It's a wild combination when you think about it: mom Jewish, dad Black, that's gotta be every real estate agent's nightmare. I own the building I rent from.

Swisher has noticed that some people think it is exotic or trendy to be of mixed descent. Reflecting the MTV generation's liberal but comodified and superficial approach to internationalism, she jokes

> I'm mixed but people can't always tell that so they like to guess what I am. "Deb, aren't you one of those Portuguese, Rastafarian, Mexican friole, Spanish, French, Italian, Arabian, like white Russian's Long Island ice-teas! That is so trendy, I wanna be one!" Like I ordered my background off of MTV. "Yes, I'd like the Nubian, Hasidic with a side of ambiguity, I love that Guess look!"

Swisher jokes about answering ethnicity questionaires by turning her answer into an absurdity and pointing out the meaninglessness of the term "other":

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> You should see how many of those family background boxes I had to check off on my college applications--black, white, Asian, other . . . what's other? Black and white with raisins? And I check that box now but I have to explain it.

She illustrates how her multiracial heritage is an advantage in terms of creating interesting stories about her heritage as well as benifitting from ethnic-based college funds.

> So I fabricated some story about one slave ship leaving Africa and going to Jerusalem for a pit stop, thus here I am. I love college because thanks to the United Negro College Fund and the Hebrew Society of America I was able to complete my degree in American Indian Studies.

Her majoring in American Indian Studies shows how some ethnic-based funds are not necessarily used to fulfill their goals of promoting their specific heritage.

Addressing how black men and women have criticized her for dating white me, Swisher jokes about dating after breaking up with her boyfriend: "I rebounded and dated everything, White guys,

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Black guys, women with really short hair--I'm kidding, not Black guys! ha, ha, ha! But that's a joke, because I have dated Black guys--and White guys, Iranians, Mexican-Americans, you name it."

Her current boyfriend is Japanese American and blacks don't bother her about dating him because he's not white. "Walking around town we look like a United Colors of Benetton ad" and

> If we have kids that would be wild because they'd be Black, jewish, and Japanese. These could be the kids of tommorrow. If you think about it because there is not a scholarship they can't get or buy.

Swisher doesn't like it when people reduce her to just black. She recounts being in the middle of nowhere in North Dakota and a white guy calling her "Chaka Khan!", and another white guy giving her an "indirect and weird compliment" by saying "`you're real cute for a Black girl'". Swisher later turned the incident into a joke:

> Like, uh, other Black women are not these maggot infested cyclops. I said you know, Thanks, I'm looking better now that the bone is out of my nose and I can speak better with the frisbee outta my lip and next time

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> you see an ugly one why don't you warn me, Captain Culture." I just returned the compliment, I said "Hey, you're really smart for a vegetable" . . . You should buy a paper, besides I'm not Black, I'm Other!

She has been frustrated as a biracial actor who was not black enough for the black roles and too black for the non-black roles. She jokes:

> Recently, I auditioned for a play for this blue collar Black woman character. They liked me and called me back and eaach time they called me back they're like "Okay, be Blacker! Be Blacker!" Then they'd say, "We want you for the Jewish part so be more Jewish, more Jewish!" But I'm somewhere in-between. I had this nighmare where I'd be Jewish with a Black accent, or be Black and say "Oy!" You know, "Oy" backwards is "Yo!"

Swisher has written a one woman standup comedy show for HBO titled "Swisher Aims to Please". In it she has a comedians nightmare about being on stage and the audience is segregated--half Black, half White and she is running back and forth saying "I'm Black

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now . . . I'm Jewish now" taking turns making fun of each group to the other group.

Some comedians say their multiracial heritage has been an insignificant part of their upbringing or personal sense of identity, but do jokes about being mixed because audiences seem to expect them. Vernon Chatman expresses such a perspective:

> Most of my jokes are not about being half black and half white perhaps because it wasn't a bit issue in my community or family. My mother said my black father was about the whitest guy she ever knew. No signs of African identity, dresses in a standard American way that doesn't reflect an alternative to the mainstream cultural identity. . . she didn't have an ethnic identity other than white middle class. There was no dramatic cultural clash.

Chatman says "it's almost a formula to talk about being from two groups, so I try to stay away from it." He attempts to get laughs by saying ridiculous things about ethnicity and tease stereotypical expectations. He introduces himself with "I'm half black and half

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white, which means I'm required to do a stereotypical joke. So here goes":

> I'm half black and half white, so when I'm driving to the store eating barbecued chicken, I pull myself over and beat myself with a police baton.

Chatman tells this joke to mixed or black audiences but not to all-white audiences. He believes all white audiences would not appreciate how the joke portrays whites beating up blacks. He also has a few jokes with Malcolm X saying "just kill whitey" that he doesn't perform for all white audiences. Joking about himself or his parents is potentially less provacative.

> It's not about growing up with parents from two different cultures--it's about growing up with two parents who force their child to dress up as a girl [laughter].
>
> Just kidding, they didn't have to force me to dress like a girl. I did it on my own [laughter].

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He first thought about making jokes about being multiracial when he was a kid when other kids at school teased him about being "a halfer." He felt obligated to respond by either joking along in a way that also put himself down, or joke about their perspective. As a comedian he jokes about other peoples' perspectives and portrays himself as "a guy who makes up ridiculous stories and sees the world as a place where ridiculous and scary things happen . . . you get from the humor what kind of guy I am."

Chatman tells a few shock appeal jokes about living in high crime areas and mass murderers. "Some manic came in and tried to strangle me when I was eating breakfast. I thought `I'll throw coffee in his face.' So I reached over to the coffee maker and started making coffee". Another joke involves mass murderer Dommer making a book: a cookbook with a recipe calling for a half pound of Tony that can be substituted with a half pound of Chuck." Tying in his heritage, he continues:

> Being half black and half white, I have to thank my parents for not believing in discrimination. I always though racism was stupid. If you strip off our skin we're all the same shivering, stinking, naked hunks of flesh.

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Humor was also a childhood survival tool for Gregory Carey, the son of a black Jamaican father and white mother. Growing up in New York City in a predominantly black neighborhood, Carey was beaten for being different. He found out he could save himself by making fun of himself before they could made fun of him. "And that's how I became accepted. If a guy came up and started calling me a "yellow nigger" I would start joking about myself being a yellow nigger to prevent them from pouncing on me." Carey says it was a matter of culture as well as race that made him stand out. His culturally Jamaican parents didn't understand that he needed certain clothes to fit in: "Mom didn't understand that when you're fat, you don't wear red corduroy pants. People in cars would see me and slam on the brakes `hey, thought you were a stop sign'" [laughter].

By the time he was in high school he was able to shift the humor about himself to observational humor about others. He says "New York City is a good testing ground for finding out peoples perceptions of your ethnicity because it changes from block to block. They have a wide range between light and dark and I fall within that." A lot of people thought he was Puerto Rican or Spanish. "I had people often speak to me in Spanish. This woman got pissed at me because I couldn't speak Spanish and because I was saying I wasn't

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Spanish." He recounts a racially ambiguous person "this guy Michel who was some kind of ethnic person where you don't know what they are" at work teasing him about looking like a "nigger":

> This guy says "Greg, you're gettin so dark that pretty soon you'll be lookin' like a nigger! ha, ha, ha!" I was gagging on my fork so hard it was making the roof of my mouth bleed. I'm like "Michel, what do you think I am?" He kind of laughed it off like "Oh, I know you ain't a nigger." I was like "no, I'm black."

Carey has resisted pressures to present himself as the Jamaican guy or "coconut man." Carey believes developing his courage as a standup is based on being himself. "And that's why I didn't want to go up as some Jamaican talking about coconuts--because that's not me." He does use the Jamaican character as an opening part of his routine and later reveals the persona to be a construction.

> I'm originally from the island of Jamaica. [Jamaican accent] Ya mon, come to de island. I take real good care of you. Leave your wallet right here, I'll take read good care of it for you. Go walk down the beach enjoy

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> yourself. Leave your wife too I'll take good care of her. And fuck. That's how I got here. A woman came down and I sleep with her. And she came down again and I sleep with her again. And then she comes down again, and this time she wants me to come to America. I figure hey, I don't want to lose a regular customer. Then I come to America only to find she has a husband and she want me to sleep with him and her at the same time. There's a lot of things I would do to stay in this country but I have to put my foot down and clear that up right away. It turned out I wound up sleepin' with her on Monday and Wednesday and him on Tuesday and Thursday, and I'll tell ya, Tuesday and Thursday was a real pain in the ass.

Carey says he's not fully comfortable with doing the Jamaican character because "once a radical Jamaican wearing the African garb just lit into me like white on rice. Someone else said don't pay any attention to her, but it really bothered me." Not wanting to be known as "the Jamaican" comic led him to limit his characterizations involving a Jamaican accent to about five or ten minutes. "If I only did the Jamaican accent bit that would be like being black and

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coming up saying `Mammy!'" Carey has turned people's expectation that he look, act, or talk like a "Jamaican" into jokes:

> A lot of people hear me talkin' and they're like "hey, why don't you sound like the Coconut man?" That's because after you've come to this country and you've been here a couple years and had your coconuts kicked a few times, you will tend to lose a foreign accent. The first thing I did when we came to this country was to lose my accent. I figured if immigration ever raided my house I was gonna act like I didn't know those aliens. I was gonna be outside yellin' [in urban black accent] "yeah, send them back, they be takin' our jobs and shit."

Carey illustrates in this example the process by which so many ethnic Americans have given up or even denied their ethnicities in their attempts to gain acceptance in the dominant American culture.

Carey also resists suggestions for him to sound or be "more black": "there's nothing worse than being black trying to be black for a black audience." Having grown up in a culturally Jamaican family prior to the hip hop generation, he sees a cultural as well as generational gap between himself and black hip hop crowds. One of

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his worst experiences was performing for a black Hip Hop audience at the Uptown Comedy Club in New York City. A "black woman" told him to "go over there and stand on the stain" but he didn't quite understand what she meant: "I said `what?' She looked at me like `you tryin' to be white: This is Harlem honey, I said stand on the stain." Carey went over to the microphone and saw there was a stain on the floor behind it. Since he has never wanted to nor attempted to pass as white, her assertion that he was trying to be white upset him and shook his confidence: "I remember getting quieter as the show went on. . . it just locked in my mind." He says he is especially disturbed by blacks that are racist towards him because he doesn't expect blacks to be racists towards other blacks.

Carey jokes about his personal experiences with people who become uncomfortable trying to find out his race or ethnicity.

> One time I put down "Other" for a job application. By law they can't ask you to fill it out. I remember the person was dying to ask me what I was. It wasn't about working at the bank. It was more like "where you from, oh, you lived in New York? That's interesting." And I talked different ways just to throw this person off and make his day difficult [laughter]. I didn't get the job.

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> Everytime you check "Other", there it goes again, or you could put mixed, then they want to know "mixed with what?"

Performance art

Teja Arboleda has found performance art to be a more suitable medium venue for his ethnic comedy than standup comedy clubs or acting. Arboleda has developed his own show performance art show "The Adventures of Ethnic Man". Presenting comic narratives, with slide photographs of family, peoples, and places as a backdrop, he introduces his multiethnic heritage and experiences in different parts of the world to portray his personal search for identity. He explains that his father's father is Filinipino-Chinese, his father's mother is African-American/Native American, his mother's father is Danish, and his mother's mother is German, and he was born in Brooklyn, New York. But I grew up in Japan, "and that's why they call me: Ethnic Man!":

> Yes it's ethnic man! Not quite black as black, not quite white as white, sort of brown, sort of inbetween, but he's never ever green!

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His motivation to perform the story of his multiethnic heritage stems from his father's denial of their African American ancestry and side of the family. He considers such denial to be part of the American pattern where people have hidden or denied their ethnicities in attemps to gain acceptance and avoid discrimination. "That secrecy exists in everyone's background in all families whether they think of themselves as mixed or not. It's always been part of why people move far away, or stop communicating with relatives." Challenging his father's denial, he jokes about how his father passed as Filipino.

> But my father always said [shaking finger] "you are German/Filipino period." I've spent what, two months in the Philippines, Does that make me a Filipino? I've spent a third of my life waiting in lines [holding an imaginary tray] does that make me a waiter?

He believes racial terminology is a problem. He believes there is no such thing as "race" or "pure races" and that as Americans we are all mixed. However, the societal denial of mixing causes problems. He says as a person of mixed Japanese, Filipino, Chinese,

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African, German, and Native American heritage he had a hard time accepting himself because he was "told that racial mixing was not good." He has been called all kinds of racial slurs and such experiences into his comic narrative about his search for his identity. "what's funny is not that I was called these names, but that I can look back at and see how ridiculous it is to be called all these different things."

As a comedian he found one of the advantages of his mixed heritage is he "can basically satirize and make fun of many different backgrounds because of my many heritages." "Japan, China, the Phillipines, Africa, America, Germany--I am those peoples and places so I have the right to make fun of them.

Treated as an outcast in various countries, he attempted to gain acceptance by acting like the people around him. Illustrating the fluidity of his ethnicity, he jokes "whenever I go anywhere, I over-adapt. Like when I came to the states I learned this one thing. [grabs crotch] `hey there, how's it goin' buddy, huh?"

Making light of racial classifications by pointing out how they don't allow for mixed ancestries, Arboleda points to different countries on globe and jokes

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> Filipinos were considered white, legally on paper. And right next door to the Philippines, the Japanese were yellow, legally on paper. Italians were brown back then, yes, Italians were considered minorities too. Indians were red and blacks were black. So legally on paper, my grandmother was dark pink. So legally on paper, I must be a pretty funny color.

He recounts how kids at the predominantly black school he attended in Bedford-Stuyvesant in New York City wanted to know if they were black or white. "My brother and I are sitting there asking, Am I black? Am I black? And the other students were looking at us going: Is he black? is he white?" Arboleda subverts the concept of race as fixed entities by showing how racial classifications change according to place and time. He challenges the concept of racial purity by showing the absurdity of attempts to classify him as one thing only. "Look at my face. Just look at my face! Can you honestly say without disgrace that I am of pure race?" He follows his shows with a half hour discussion period to answer questions about his perspectives on race and ethnicity.

Arboleda is critical of the census' classification system both on and off-stage. Arboleda responded with humor and satire to the

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census at a Federal Office of Management and Budget hearing. He explained that he is listed as white on his birth certificate because of his father's desire to pass as white. However, he refused to state his ethnic or racial identity in the 1990 census form. An employee of the Census Bureau assumed on the basis of his last name and brown skin that he was Hispanic and marked the Hispanic box. Arboleda joked "So I was born legally white. Now I'm legally Hispanic. If I ever run for office, the media will hunt me down and splash newspapers with headlines that read "Arboleda, candidate, falsified his race."[viii]

The dominant conception of mixed race as a tragic abnormality largely undermines the comic potential of multiracial African American identity. Says Lisa Jones "If mixed race were made normal, we could look forward to the comic mulatto, the introspective, the slovenly. We might one day come to miss ye olde tragic mulatto, the world's pet mule" (62).

The acceptability of mixed race as a comic situation depends on the audience. Many of the speeches at interracial conferences are riddled with humor. People insenstive to people of mixed descent become targets of satire. Jones began her speech at the "Common Differences" conference of interracial student groups sponsored by Interracial Pride (I-Pride) at Wesleyan University in 1993 with:

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> Who are you, what are you, where are you from, no where are you really from, where are your parents from, are your grandparents Americans" Are you from here, what's your background, what's your nationality, where do you live? Are you black, are you white, do you speak Spanish? Are you really white, are you really black? Are you Puerto Rican, are you half and half, are you biracial, multiracial, interracial, transracial, racially unknown, race neutral, colorless, colorblind, down with the rat race *or the human race? Who are you? Where are you coming from? Who are your people?* (Jones53).
>
> THE IDENTITY FAIRY: Excuse me, before you get all up in my business, don't you want to know my name?

Jones emphasizes how some people are more interested in fitting racially ambiguous people into preconceived categories than in finding out who they really are as a person.

The comic mulatto as a subject subvert the tragic trope by asserting an open-ended sense of humor, chance, and personality.

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[i] The Friars' roasts traditionally are "down and dirty, no-holds-barred affairs at which the guest of honor is skewered by jokes that often are crude." Associated Press, In The Boston Sunday Globe Oct. 10, 1993, p. 29.

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[ii] Associated Press "Dinkins hits actor's racial jokes at roast for Goldberg" The Boston Sunday Globe Oct. 10, 1993, p. 29.

[iii] "Ted Danson's Night of Shame: What he said and why he said it" The Globe Oct. 26, 1993, p. 17.

[iv] Candy Mills "Whoopi-Do!" Interrace Magazine5:2, Dec. 1993, pp. 9-10.

[v] Editor "Words of Love," The Washington Afro-American Oct. 16, 1993.

[vi] Michael Blowen "Danson, Goldberg Speak Out" The Boston Globe, Oct. 22, 1993.

[vii] personal interview with author, January 1994.

[viii] Holmes, Steven. "U.S. Urged to Reflect Wider Diversity In Racial and Ethnic Classifications." The New York Times. Friday, July 9, 1994. Arboleda testified "If I am coerced into categorizing myself as only one of the races or ethnicities provided in legal forms or applications, I can onlly comply dishonestly and immorally unless I am given the option of multiracial."

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Chapter Four

CHICANO/LATINO LAUGHTER DE LA RAZA COSMICA

> I didn't cross the border, the border crossed me.
>
> Chicano joke

> What many people in the border say is that we assume a multiple repertoire of identities. We have transitional identities in the making. We are developing new cultures. Jokingly, we have talked about imaginary identities that make more sense than the ones we are offered as possibilities.
>
> Guillermo Gomez-Pena (In Fusco 154)

Chicano and Latino comedy have historically addressed issues of ethnic hybridity. The United States' takeover and conversion of Northern Mexico into California, Texas, Nevada, New Mexico, and Arizona transformed the remaining population which had previously been Mexican into Chicanos. Chicano identity emerged as a multiethnic identity which was neither Mexican nor "American," but somewhere in-between these two dominant cultures. Chicanos were ridiculed and viewed as deviant and inferior from the mono-cultural

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perspectives of both Mexicans and Anglo-Americans (Sanchez-Tranquilino 558).

Both American and Mexican perspectives marginalized and satirized figures of rural Indians and rural peasants as foolish and poor peasants . Despite the vast majority of Mexicans being of both Spanish and Indian ancestry, Mexicans privileged their Spanish ancestries over their Indian heritages in attempts to associate themselves with the socio-economically more powerful group. Spanish Mexican identities were associated with urban culture in contrast to the rural image of indigenous peoples. Mexican ethnic humor was based on incongruities between rural values of Indian mestizos and their reactions to the modern city culture. Mexican theater satirically referred to Chicanos as "Casindio" which means "almost Indian" (Hernandez 55). Whereas Chicanos were viewed as cultural embarrassments and "sinister clowns" (Hernandez 27) by Mexicans and deviant by Anglos, Chicanos took pride in their unique difference.

Comic Figures

Viewed as aliens by both Americans and Mexicans, Chicano theater groups transformed figures which had been previously ridiculed in Mexican theater into figures of Chicano pride. The

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figures of the peladito, pachuco, and pocho (in both male and female forms) are imbued with the spirit of "rasquachismo" or cultural hybridity which takes pride in things denigrated by the two dominant cultures.

From the nineteenth century to the1920s and1930s, and to a lesser extent through the 1960s Mexican-American performance troupes toured along the Mexican-American border in tent shows known as carpas, and vaudeville productions referred to as variedades. These shows were an important part of Mexican-American culture and included sketches about current living conditions and political issues, as well as musical, dance, and other entertainment (Huerta 229). Their comic routines became a platform for airing the cultural conflicts they experienced as a conquered people in the United States whose culture was threatened, and their experiences of assimilation to American tastes and life-styles, pocho status as a people exiled from Mexico, and as a minority oppressed by a larger monolithic culture (Kanellos 81; 117).

The peladito (comic hobo character) was the star character in satirical and often political reviews. A trickster-like figure, the peladito was financially poor, poorly educated, had vulgar low-class habits and language, and was witty in mediating between Chicano, American, and Mexican cultures. The peladito, best exemplified by

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Cantinflas, improvises a dialog which "brings to the scene the fine humor of the people, their critical spirit, their complaints and desires; and the people, in turn, upon seeing their own existence portrayed on the stage, cooperate directly with the comics, conversing with them, proposing problems for their inventive spirits to solve, rewarding and punishing them, with crude sincerity" (In Kanellos 78). "The true voice of the people is heard in the carpas, and what no newspaper dare print is said with open frankness by these traveling comics" (In Kanellos 80). Upper-class Mexicans and Mexican Americans were offended by the peladito's lower class orientation and mockery of the upper classes. The pelidito was censured in Mexico during the 1920s.

Similar to the peladito of the carpas was the pelado of the vaudeville shows. The pelado was an underdog known for his biting satire, picaresque adventures, and humorous use of Calo (Spanglish slang) in his conflicts with Mexican and Anglo-American cultures.

Multicultural resourcefulness are primary traits of other Chicano comic figures such as the pocho(a) and pachuco(a). The pocho and pachuco figures were initially used in Spanish speaking Mexcian oriented theater to ridicule Chicanos for violating the social and linguistic norms of both Mexico (Spanish) and the United States (Anglo). Both figures became adopted by Chicanos to represent their

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subjectivity which was critical of both American and Mexican cultures. Both figures were somewhat acculturated to Anglo ways but spoke a mixed form of English and Spanish and were neither accepted as American nor Mexican.

The pachuco and pachucas were stylish urban working class deviants characterized by oversized suits, Chicano pride, unorthodox stance, and underworld slang. They became multicultural trickster figures who defied, critiqued, and exploited monocultural Mexicans and Americans. The pachuco emerged during World War II when both United States and Mexican nationalist identities were strong and viewed Chicanos as an offense to the national identities of both. Reflecting dominant attitudes of the times, Octavio Paz wrote of the pachuco as a "a tragic," "delinquent," "sinister clown," an "existential casualty neither Mexican nor American . . . his whole being is sheer negative impulse, a tangle of contradictions, an enigma. Even his very name is enigmatic: pachuco, a word of uncertain derivation, saying nothing and saying everything" (In Sanchez-Tranquilino 558).

Chicanos adopted and embodied the figure of the pachuco as a subculture by blending aspects of masculine "outsider" images from Anglo American popular culture own masculine "outsiders" such as the Southern dandy, the Western gambler, the modern urban gangster, with their own cultural orientation. Neither "inside" nor

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"outside" of American culture, the pachuco ruptured the structure of Otherness (Hernandez 559): Pachuco culture was a multicultural assemblage and affirmation: "by appropriation, transgression, breaking and re-structuring the laws of language: In the speech of Calo--and pochismos, but also in the languages of the body, gesture, hair, tattoos, dress, and dance; and in the languages of space, the city, the barrio, the street" (Hernandez 559). The "padded, finger-length coat with wide lapels; the narrow-brimmed lid or hat; the draped pants with near pleats, ballooning to the knee then narrowing tightly at the ankle; the looping chain; doubled soled shoes" and the pachuca with "same drape coat, straight black skirt or narrow slacks, flat black shoes or `zombie slippers' and beehive hairdo" (Hernandez 560). As a Chicano subject the Pachuco is a figure of resourcefulness and Chicano pride. The Anglo backlash to the pachuco subculture culminated in white sailors attacking, beating, and destroying the clothes of hundreds of pachucos in what is referred to as the "Zoot Suit Riots." A contemporary variation of the pachuco, the cholo is a poor, urban, vulgar, uneducated, marijuana-puffing, low-riding gangster with tatoos, floppy oversized clothes, and a bandana on his head.

Los vendidos are comic figures of ridicule also referred to as "sell-outs"--those seen as denying their mestizo racial and ethnic

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heritage in their aspirations to be Euro-American (Anglo) or European (Hispanic)--are Chicano figures of ridicule and satire representing the anti-thesis of Chicano identity. Common names for sell-out characters are Ben Dejo (*pendejo* means stupid or nieve), Ben Dido (*vendido* = sellout), and Tio Taco.

Although the figure of the pocho was originally stigmatized and ridiculed as a cultural sellout by both Mexicans and Chicanos, since the 1960s it was adopted as the voice of the subject as a dignified vehicle for Chicano identity and assertion of values (Hernandez 113). For the pocho as a subject ethnicity and racial identity remains central despite acculturation. Pocho Magazine , the first magazine about, for, and by pochos, reflects the Chicano appropriation and transformation of an initially derogatory term into one of pride by the editors of the satirical Chicano magazine Pocho Magazine (no. 1):

EL POCHO MANIFESTO

> Pocho is a term that has been used by uptight, culturally pompous Mexicanos to describe their "bastard cousins to the north", the Chicano or Mexican-American, (El Pinche Pocho), who by their accounts, has lost all of their original Mexican culture because of their surrounding US imperialist bullshit environment and Speedy Gonzales.

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> We at POCHO MAGAZINE accept Pocho as a term of empowerment for tacky, uncultured, fucked-up-Spanish-speaking Pochos everywhere . . . It's a deep burning resentment of cultural imperialism from both sides of the imaginary border so let the truth be known! From Taco Bell to Pollo Loco, from El Santo to La Bamba, from Gigante to Kmart, from Tijuana to Bakersfield, Pochos arise and jump start your cars, pull out your bus transfers, wax your huaraches-we must mobilize!
>
> POCHO POWER!

Pocho Magazine portrays pocho subjectivity as under siege by Euro-centric cultural imperialism. In a parodic letter to the editor representing the Euro-centric aversion to Chicanos, Edward P. Choncho, Editor-In-Charge Hispanic Magazine writes:

> Dear Pocho Pendejos
>
> Your greasy little chalupa-rag of a magazine is a cancerous growth on the gonads of Hispanic Heritage. Such brown trash is slanderous, filthy and intolerable. Everyone knows that mestizos are nothing but byproducts of a supreme gene tolerated only to produce

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> mindless slaves to serve our needs. Your jungle dwelling ancestors were sacrificing internal organs on gaudily painted pyramids as we easily marched in and conquered their measly backwater "empire". Your inherited lack of fine European sensibilities are quite evident in the absence of quality in the cave-graffiti you call magazine graphics. As our hero and deity Hernan Cortez once said, "Aztec, Shmaztec-as long as I'm rich." (no. 3)

This joke letter ridicules the Hispanic person for dogmatically denigrating the indigenous heritage which they also share.

Comic figures such as peladitos, pachucos, vendidos, and pochos are used as vehicles to express the situation of Chicanos as a people mediating the cultural imperialism of both the United States and Mexico. Portraying an integral aspect of Chicano identity, culture, and politics, they evoke an instant laughter of recognition among Chicano audiences.

Satirical Sketches

> Chicanos increasingly saw a parallel between themselves and the native peoples of other colonized lands: all had

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> been conquered, all had been reduced to menial labor, and all had been used to extract the natural bounty of their own land for the benefit of the conqueror.
>
> John R. Chavez (In Fregoso10)

> It is not enough to say we suffer an identity crisis, because the crisis has been our way of life for the last five hundred years.
>
> Luis Valdez (In Fregoso 7)

In the mid-1960s the term Chicano came to identify a political consciousness which privileged the non-European indigenous past (rather than European heritage), distinction from both Anglo-American and Mexican cultures, and a working class history. Springing from the context of the Civil Rights Movement, striking Chicano farmworkers, the Chicano student movement, and el renacimiento (re-birth of Chicano created literature), Luis Valdez' politically charged El Teatro Campesino was initially created in 1965 to address the birth of Chicanismo, the plight of the Chicano farmworkers, and other socio-political needs.

Luis Valdez and Teatro Campesino's asserted a political framework and a collection of short satirical sketches or "actos" in

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Actos (1971) for community and student groups to perform which started a national grass-roots Chicano teatro movement.

> 1. Chicanos must be seen as a nation with geographic, religious, cultural and racial roots in Aztlan. Teatros must further the idea of nationalism and create a national theater based on identification with the American Indian past.
>
> 2. The organizational support of the national theater would be from within, for, "the corazon de la Raza cannot be revolutionized on a grant from Uncle Sam."
>
> 3. The teatros must never get away from La Raza . . . . If the Raza will not come to the theater, then the theater must go to the Raza. This, in the long run, will determine the shape, style, content, spirit, and form of el teatro chicano. (In Kanellos 10)

Teatro Campesino fostered solidarity among a heterogeneous Chicano community by sensitizing it to the plight of the farmworkers, class, cultural identity and politics.

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El Teatro Campesino's style of agitprop incorporating the spirit and presentational style of the commedia dell'arte with the humor, character types, folklore and popular culture previously articulated by Mexican American vaudeville companies. Humor, often slapstick, played a central role in satirizing the opposition. Valdez advocated the use of up-to-date improvisational actos to "Inspire the audience to social action. Illuminate specific points about social problems. Satirize the opposition. Show or hint at solution. Show what the people are feeling" (In Kanellos 20).

Addressing cultural and political divisions among Chicanos, Valdez' comedy "Los Vendidos" is a farcical attack on the political manipulation of Chicano stereotypes, as well as on Mexican Americans who deny their cultural heritage and otherwise "sell-out" in their attempt to become "American". Politically active Chicanos are the heroes and apolitical Mexican Americans are the villians. The character Mrs. Jimenez insists that her name be pronounced "JIM-enez" rather than "Jimenez" (the J is pronounced like a "G" rather than as an "H" sound as is usually done in Spanish) (Huerta 47).

Middle-class oriented Mexican Americans have been offended by the play, especially those who identified with the middle-class aspirations of Mrs. Jimenez. At one show a drunk man asked "What are you insulting me for?" Noticing he had a knife, Valdez replied

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"What, it's just a skit about a sell-out Mexican American." The man insisted "Well, I'm not a sell-out." Valdez said "Well, shit, we didn't even say it was you" (Huerta 67).

Inspired by Teatro Campesino, over a hundred Chicano theater groups associated with labor and social movements spread across the country in the 1970s, from The Teatro de la Gente and the cannery workers in San Jose, the Teatro Al a Latina and the Puerto Rican tomato pickers in South Jersey, to the Teatro Trucha and the St. Luke's hospital workers in Chicago. These groups addressed themes relevant to their audiences such as the war in Vietnam and the war at home: the battle against inadequate and Euro-centric schooling, violence, drugs, poverty and police brutality in the barrios.

El Teatro de la Gente's "El Cuento de la Migra" portrays the tribulations of an illegal Mexican immigrant at the hands of the border patrol, the labor contractor, the factory owner, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service. The acto begins with a corrido (song) establishing the historical background:

> In the year eighteen hundred
> and forty-eight
> two rulers signed a contract

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and divided my people

Then an "old-timer" relates his personal experiences following monologue:

> . . . and from that time on that border just south of us has existed. Sure, but it's a very capricious border, not recognized by Mexican workers. And if somebody has the nerve to call me a wetback just because I crossed a little river just so wide, he better find out who's the super-wetback who crossed that great ocean to get here. Yes, sir, because I came to this land. But I was also born in this land. That's why I've come to tell you this story, the story about the *migra* (The Immigration and Naturalization Service). Yes, sir, that snake, that animal that's putting it to our mother (literally, "Mexico," figuratively "fucking our mothers"). The story begins in 1970 when all of a sudden: Watch out, here comes the migra! (Kanellos 43).

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The narrative is an example of the personal experience style used by teatros to communicate in the vernacular familiar to rural working-class Latinos.

Sophisticated Urban Comedy

Chicano and Latino comedy in the 1980s began to reflect a more heterogeneous population. The improvisation comedy group Latins Anonymous was created in the 1980s by actors/writers from Mexico, Columbia, Guatemala, and the American Southwest to speak for the "new generation, which included sophisticated, mainstream, multi-national, urban dwellers whose American experience was more complex than that of their parents" (Leschin 4). The group's initial members Luisa Leschin, Armoando Molina, Rick Najera and Diane Rodriguez chose the name "Latins Anonymous" because Latinos were perceived as "anonymous" in the broader U.S. Society. They mixed the ganas (guts) and purpose of teatro with the slickness of "Saturday Night Live" styled sketch comedy to provide a comedic analysis of the contemporary Latino condition.

Their show "Latins Anonymous" addresses how nationalism keeps us divided, and the denial of Latin American heritage. The skit centers on a series of Latins Anonymous meetings intended to help Latin Americans acknowledge their heritage.

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Rick is a Mexican-American torn between cultures.

> I love commercials. They are so educational. They let me know what I need. I got a lot of needs `cause I'm Mexican-American. Not just Mexican, but American needs. . . I need Mexcian food. And American food. My Mexican side needs carne asada. My American side needs New York steak, which is basically bland carne asada [laughter]. I love Mexican food. When I see that Rosarita Refried Bean commercial, my Mexican side just wants to take that Rosarita woman and put her on a kitchen table and, wango, wango, wango! [laughter] and have twelve children through her. But my American side would like to get to know her better, talk to her, establish some honesty, communication, and then wango, wango, wango! [laugher] and have 2.5 kids with her [laughter].

This comparison emphasizes the similarities in the needs of both Mexicans and Americans. Then Rick emphasizes the differences, especially in terms of how the American side mistreats the Mexican side and nationalism divides them both.

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> My American side would like to hang out with his friends, and that's called a fraternity. But when my Mexican side hangs out with his friends, it's called a street gang! [laughter] I hate contradictions. . .

Rick explains he calls himself Mexican so he won't forget his past, and American because that's what he is. He asks "when do I get to call myself an American? When do I get to drive past San Clemente and not get stopped by a guy in a green uniform on top of my trunk looking for illegal aliens" [laughter].

After discussing inequalities, Rick embodies how nationalisms divide both sides:

> I love folklorico dancing. . . Gotta dance! (Tries to dance but can't). Oh, my God, I've lost my rhythm. My American side is invading my central nervous system (in a Mexican voice): You colonizing bastards. (In a Yuppie tone): Go back to Mexico, dude. (Mexican voice): I didn't cross the border, the border crossed me. (Yuppie voice): You wetback. (Yuppie voice): You foreigner. (Mexican voice): You Gringo. (Yuppie voice): You beaner. (Mexican

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voice): You Gavacho. (Yuppie voice): You wetback. (Mexican voice): Wetback? Nobody calls me a wetback. I'll kill you. (He chokes himself, Yuppie voice): Help me, help me! The Mexican is going to kill me. Help, help! Somebody call the border patrol!

Rick attributes the cultural conflicts of being Mexican-American not to internal cultural conflicts within himself but to American colonization of Mexico and nationalisms that divide them.

Portraying how divisions between Latinos are caused by the denial of Latino roots, Nicollet is in denial: "My fazer was Spanish, but from Spain . . . I am so un-Latin zat I am sure I was adopted. As you can tell, I am Francaise (pronounced Francez). My mozer `eeez Francaise, so bien sur, I am Francasise." Nicollette later admits she is not French, is from Guatamala, and that her name is really Luisa. "I was nine when we moved to the States and that's when I decided to never speak Spanish again, and to change my name from Luisa Josefina Gomez to Nicollette Sauvignon Blanc." Despite this confession, she still has difficulty saying she is Latino:

(struggling) "I admit I'm La . . . La . . . I admit I'm La . . . La . . . I'm really Russian you know? For real. It's not

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even a lie. My mom's Russian. So that makes me half-Russian.

The group congratulates her for her confession "What an incredible share! A Guata-Russian?" but Luisa is embarrassed and runs off stage [laughter]. By the end of the skit Luisa is admits she is Latino.

Their show "The La La Awards" is a satirical look at the Latino presence in Hollywood. Centered over the proscenium hangs a round, large, "Mayan-meets-Hollywood" rendering to the comedy and tragedy masks. The sketch is a parody of how Hollywood has portrayed Latino figures. It ends with a quote from Jose Vasconselos, Mexican philosopher, "The red, white, yellow, black . . .America is home to all of them. In America we are creating a new race, la raza cosmica, the cosmic race (Leschin 51).

The Latino/Chicano comedy troupe Culture Clash was formed in 1984 by Ric Salinas, Richard Montoya, Herbert Siguenza, Jose Antonio Burciaga "the Chicano Will Rogers", Marga Gomez, and Monica Placios. Their style of "informed slapstick" was inspired by Teatro Campesino, Lenny Bruce, Richard Pryor, Cantinflas, Charlie Chaplin, Freddy Prinze, Whoopi Goldberg, Paul Rodriguez, Mel Brooks, Martin and Lewis, Jackie Gleason, Lucille Ball and Ernie Kovacs and Anna Deavere Smith. Their name "Culture Clash" signifies the culture clash

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of Latinos against mainstream America, as well as the culture clash between different Latino ethnicities. They intially performed a caberet syle where they took individual turns telling jokes and doing improv. When Gomez, Placios, and Burciaga left the group, Montoya, Siguenza, and Salinas began developing full length narrative plays in which they perform as themselves. Richard Montoya's parents are Chicano and he grew up in San Diego. Ric Salinas was born in El Salvador and grew up in San Francisco. Herbert Siguenza was born in San Francisco of parents from El Salvador and grew up in San Francisco and El Salvador. Their anger at being treated like "immigrants" in America fuels their work.

Their first play "The Mission" addresses the sadistic oppression of Mission Indians at the hands of Father Junipero Serra in the scene "Serra Overture, 1776). Serra exclaims "Oh, my little brown ones . . . my little savages . . .when I found these little creatures they were living in the cracks of the earth. Now, they say no to crack! Verdad! (Serra yanks the Indios' heads back by their hair). "The guilt I have instilled in these Indios is the very same guilt passed on to future generations of Indios, Mestizos, and struggling Latino actors." In the scene "Mission Apartment, 1990s) Richard recounts when someone slipped peyote in his nachos he dreamt he flew back in time and was

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an Indio in the Mission and was beaten by Junipero Serra for telling jokes.

In "Mission Apartment" Richard and Herbert express their frustrations as brown-skinned Chicano actors trying to find theater work. Richard reads a casting notice in a newspaper:

> Richard: Hey, guys . . . the American Conservatory Theater is including a Hispanic play in their upcoming, prestigious season. How innovative of them! (reading) A tall Hispanic actor is needed.
>
> Herber: Bye, Ric.
>
> Richard (Reading: Preferably with blond hair . . .
>
> Herbert: Bye, Herb.
>
> Richard (reading): . . . and blue eyes.
>
> Herbert: Hey, Rich, you got one blue eye, you should do it.
>
> [Richard Montoya has one blue eye and one brown eye]

Culture Clash departs from the stereotypical and apolitical Latino roles which Hollywood promotes. In producing their own shows they are able to remain true to themselves as Chicanos. Montoya says "those fools that are getting a riding deal from

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Hollywood are the ones that are still looking in the mirrors and saying `I see a dark person, and I hate myself.' We're saying we see Chicanos in the mirror and we love ourselves" (Hernandez 9). One aspect of loving themselves as Chicanos is their assertion of indigenous heritage.

"Bowl of Beings" opens with the skit "Don Colon (The First Chicano Opera, 1492)" as an Indian woman holding a baby identifies herself as "America the Beautiful" and asks Columbus (Don Colon) to bless her baby, the last son of Chief Anacaona. Columbus angrily tells America "when he grows up to be an Indian activist he's going to want to rip my heart out, he's going to want to avenge his father, he'll want to boycott Columbus Day." Columbus tells his second son Ferdinand to "kill him!" America pleads "No Don Colon, not this child. He'll grow up to be a good Indian and celebrate Columbus Day." Then she defiantly pulls out a knife and exclaims "we were here long before the masters of death arrived who murdered under the guise of Christianity." Columbus shoots and kills America.

He then asks his first son "Venito, how come you just stood there and did nothing?" Vinnie says "Because she is my mother! My mother! I am confused and full of rage!" When Columbus tells Vinnie "maybe it is best that you forget your Indian past" he responds

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"never!" Columbus says "Oh Vinnie, I know, you're confused, you're full of rage. But then again . . . you're history's first Chicano!"

> Don Colon: Now act like a man and bury your Mama America. . . I should have never gotten involved with America, should never have fooled with virgin territory . . . because now I have created a monster--
> Don Colon & Ferdinand: A CHICANO!!!

Don Colon whispers something in Ferdinands ear then Ferdinand pulls out a variety of weapons--a slingshot, dynamite, a scud missile--before settling on a gun. Ferdinand is about to shoot Vinnie when America sits up and stabs Ferdinand then falls back dead. Vinnie confronts Columbus:

> Look what you have done Don Colon. You raped and murdered my mother America and you hired my brother to kill me. One day my people will populate this so-called New World. . . Yes, yes. Your time has come, Don Colon. I am the nuevo hombre, a product of two worlds. I am a product of both worlds and I have no idea why I'm speakin' in an English accent. I now now what I must do.

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Vinne then grabs the gun and points it at Columbus "This is for five hundred years of genocide. (He shoots) This is for all Native Americans. (He fires) This is for La Raza. (He shoots). This is for Fernando Valenzuela. (He shoots).

In the skit "Chicano on the Storm" Montoya wakes up in a mental hospital wearing a straightjacket and is told he is there "because you we're confused and full of rage. Let's take your medicine, relax. Today's our Columbus special. Chicano will be replaced in the nineties. The new term is `tropical anal mist'" [laughter]. He screams "What the fuck are you looking at up there?"

> Haven't you ever seen a multicultural nightmare coming unglued right before your very eyes? I'm Spanish and American Indian, a "Dances With Wolves" kind of Indian--ahoo! . . . ignore the critics, they don't understaand my multipersonality multicultural ways. Hell, I don't even understand them and I wrote this shit. . . my stomache feels like a Marquez novel: *Love in the Time of Colorization.*

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Culture Clash is the top ranked Latino comedy group of the 1990s according to the "Top 100 Latino Comics & Comedians" list compiled by Entertainment Consulting Services in Los Angeles. "Bowl of Beings" premiered on PBS in 1992. Culture Clash was featured on the six week series "Culture Clash" on Fox Television Network. Their show "Radio Mambo: Culture Clash invades Miami" was awarded a Bessie Award for Best Theatre Performance of 1996. Despite their success, their performances have been limited to small venues. Montoya questions why larger venues will not feature them: "What do those theaters do? They tend to pick one safe Latino folklorico magic realism play and say `we have done our one [Latino] play a year'" (Hernandez 9). According to Montoya, Latinos still have few opportunities "from Hollywood even to the stages of the politically correct Bay Area the chances that you'll ever get on the stage and perform are slim . . . but if you have the burning desire to put up a little stage in your backyard and do it, then do it. Because that's where you are going to end up performing" (Hernandez 9). Assistant producer Rene Yanez, who first brought the group together in 1984 for a Cinco de Mayo celebration, says "because of this country's racial politics" there is "a tension that deprives talented people of opportunity" (Hernandez 9).

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Standup

Many of the themes typically found among Chicano/Latino comedy groups are expressed by Chicano/Latino standup comedians. Jeff Valdez jokes about his name symbolizing his parents' assimilation: "My brothers' names are Alfonso, Lorenzo, Ramon . . . [and me], Jeff. I guess that was right about the time my parents assimilated . . . right there" (Menard 19). Whereas Chicano comedy groups perform primarily for community cultural events and theaters, standups perform primarily for comedy clubs.

Prior to the inception of the Chicano cable television KTLA comedy show "Comedy Compadres" (1993-1994), and Chicano owned comedy clubs about the same time, there were almost no venues for Chicano standup comedians. According to Carlos Mencia before "Comedy Compadres" "successful Latinos in standup were practically nonexistent . . . Paul Rodriguez was the only one I knew about" (Menard 19). Paul Rodriguez was inspired to address racial and cultural politics by black comics such as Dick Gregory and Richard Pryor. Jose Simon, a comedian featured on "Comedy Compadres," learned comedy from white comedians such as Robin Williams and James Carey because "on TV most of the comedians are non-minority."

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While some comedy clubs allow Chicano comedians to perform, many Chicano comedians still encounter difficulties, especially in smaller towns. Jose Simon explains "I may be the first Chicano they've seen--so I'm breaking those cultural boundaries. My job is to make them aware through humor to break down racism and negative stereotypes." But some people may not want to hear a Chicano perspective. Simon has had his worst experiences in the Northwest and Idaho with white audiences. He recounts performing in Idaho "I had some people laughing, but other people didn't like it because I was a Chicano comedian in their territory and they didn't like it." Then some guys starting yelling racial slurs such as "Spic" and "Beaner" and telling him to "go back to Mexico where you belong." In mid-performance a glass full of tequila was thrown and bounced off his head. When he went to his car two men with a shotgun told they would shoot him if he didn't leave. Simon recounts after another show the sheriff showed up and "he said `you better leave town now--they mean it,' and took me to my hotel to get my stuff, then to the airport." Simon to get in his car and made him pick up his belongings at the hotel and leave on the next airplane: Simon says he will never perform in Idaho again because he values his life too much.

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Anticipating white men to view him as an interracial sexual threat, Simon avoids saying anything about sex for his first ten minutes. Then he jokes about being international: "my head is Canada, my body is the U.S. and below the belt is South of the Border." He notices their relief when they find out he is married: "as soon as I mention I'm married and have a kid, the tension in the room drops. They're like, oh, `he's not going to pick up on my white woman.' White people are so sensitive, after all they've done.

Simon feels more free to express Chicano issues such as "The Border, immigration, and The Tortilla Wall" with multiethnic audiences:

> A multiethnic setting makes multiethnic humor funnier. They feel part of the culture, part of the world for that moment. The closer to the border, the more they can relate. Tulane Texas is great, they give me standing ovations, I'm King in Texas with the best crowd reaction. In Texas they can relate to what I say because they've gone through it, and also in Southern California.

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Simon believes "ethnic humor works best if you are one yourself . . . there are unifying themes among minority comedians" such as "being screwed by the white man. You always get a laugh off `whitey did this, whitey did that.'"

Simon jokes about the discrimination he faces as a Chicano to introduce himself: "My name is Jose Simon [pronounced "Ho-Zay See-mone"] unless I'm looking for a job, then it's Joe Simon" ["Simun"]" [laughter]. In contrast to Mrs. Jimenez in "Los Vendidos" who insists on Anglicizes her name, Jose Simone resents pressures to Anglicize his name. Simon's joke about his name comes from his experience of a teacher in high school telling him his name was "Joe Simon" and that she would not respond to "Jose Simon": "that [joke] came from my high school teacher who told me my name was `Joe' in the U.S. She would mark me absent if I answered to Jose Simon. I had to answer as Joe Simon. It is also his critique of the dominant culture which discriminates against people who retain aspects of Chicano culture such as Spanish names and language. Addressing the risks Mexicans take as "illegal aliens" he jokes "they should have slot machines with green cards."

During the 1980s Latina comics Marga Gomez and Monica Palacios billed themselves as "the only Latina lesbian comedy team

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in the universe." Because Gomez is openly lesbian, as an actress she is often pigeon-holed as lesbian for acting jobs, but often seen as too ethnic for lesbian parts. She was told by producers for a gay special on television they were looking for a more "traditional" lesbian comedy act, which she jokes about in her show "Line Around the Block": "When did [this tradition] start? February?" (Gerdhard 35). She says in standup she has the freedom to express herself more fully: "The mainstream wants to pigeon-hole me as only doing lesbian stuff . . . In my standup, and in interviews, I get to be me. There's no pressure on me to hide who I am" (Peifer 41).

Marga Gomez, a standup, solo performer, actress, and original member of Culture Clash, was the only daughter of a Cuban comedian-impresario and a Puerto Rican dancer and aspiring actor. She performed in her father's comedy sketches while growing up in the 1960s. In the 1970s she performed with Lilith, a feminist theater collective, which informed her material when she made her name as a standup during the 1980s, and her performance shows in the 1990s. Gomez' main influences/mentors/heroes are Lily Tomlin, Jane Wagner, Richard Pryor, Willy Chevalier, and Ernie Kovacs (In Russell 159).

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Gomez has become an inspiration to a new generation of Latina and lesbian comedians such as Mimi Freed. Freed began her comedy career in 1986 in New York City where she grew up and relocated to San Francisco in 1991. As a lesbian of color her main venues are gay and lesbian venues. "I'm going in through the gay/lesbian door. So are other comedians of color. . . Gay and lesbians are a new market. Double income with no kids."

As a person of Cuban and Italian descent with an ambiguous appearances, Freed believes people expect her to acknowledge her ethnicity then have their "perceptions blown away." She walks to the microphone and asks:

> If Don King and Chaka Khan had a baby would their hair be as large as mine? [pointing to her large head of kinky tan hair] This isn't an Afro this is an Airfro! [laughter] People see me and they think "she's ethnic something." I'm Swedish. I'm kidding. I'm actually Cuban and Italian.

She makes a few jokes by combining stereotypical traits from both ethnicities.

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> I'm like a hairy neurotic with a bad temper. It's actually a confusing combination. It's like one side of you throws the pizza and the other side shoots it down [laughter]. I didn't know who I was supposed to root for in West Side story because I identified with both [laughter].

She combines her multiethnicity with her lesbian sexual orientation and gender ambiguity. After attributing her facial hair and low voice to her father's Italian side, she jokes

> I feel like an Italian man trapped inside a Cuban woman's body. So [Italian accent] "I wanna make a love to myself all a time [laughter]." And I let myself because that's the kinda girl I am and kinda guy too [laughter].

Freed says this joke is based upon her father as a macho male who divorced eight times. Reflecting on her lesbianism she jokes "I think my father is using me to fuck women." Freed addresses gender ambiguities of some of her features which are considered masculine.

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> Facial hair and a deep voice. Those are the perks of my heritage. I'm mistaken for a man on the phone. [imaginary phone] "Well, I guess this means I'll be getting what I want [laughter]. With the rise of Frida Kahlo, now my facial hair is in [laughter]. I blame testosterone problems on my father. I like to blame someone else for my problems the American Way [laughter].

Freed told me her real last name is Gonzalez but decided to use Freed as a stage name to avoid ethnic discrimination. "When I use Freed I get treated on the phone in that unaccented Midwestern way. Gonzalez gives the perception that I'm Mexican." She associates Freed with her freedom from being bound to any one group, though laments her loss of ethnicity "I have had the unfortunate opportunity to have my ethnicity removed." However, she finds audiences expect her to address her ethnicity.

Freed likes to compare similarities as well as differences between ethnic groups.

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> Both of my parents were emotional fascists when it came to my allowance it was like having Castro for my mom and Mussolini for my father.

Freed thinks of each ethnic group as "a patch in the American quilt and herself as a "thread person". While she acknowledges the people at the core of cultures as those who are "most true" to their cultures, she sees herself as helping to create bonds between groups. She affirms the validity of people at the core of cultures as long as they accept her integrationist beliefs. She sometimes encounters negative responses to her integrationist beliefs. She recounts gay and lesbians at Josie's, where she performs regularly, reacting negatively to her expressing bisexuality.

Performance Art

Standup comedians often develop solo performance art shows which allow them to develop their material in a more in-depth or complex way. Gomez became a solo performance artist because it allows her to address issues in a more complex way than standup. "As a stand-up comedian for eight years I used my personal experiences as material fodder but too often I had to simplify my

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ideas to get laughs. Since I was wanting to explore the complexities of assimilation and sexual identity, comedy clubs were becoming less appropriate venues" (In Russell 160). She was awarded a Solo Mio Award in 1996 which recognizes solo performances that reflect political activism. She introduces herself in her show "Joking the Chicken" with

> "Hi my name is Marga Gomez. I'm half Cuban, half lesbian. I'm not into labels, I like people to know everything about me because sometimes I have new members of the audience I don't want them freaking out in the middle of my show when they discover I'm Cuban ya know."

Her introduction suggests that her audiences expect people to be more bothered by her being a lesbian than a Cuban, but having that line of thought changed by her assertion of wanting to avoid their freaking out when they discover she's Cuban. As a regularly featured act at Josie's Cabaret and Juice Joint which has primarily white lesbian audiences, Gomez addresses intersections of lesbian sexuality and ethnicity.

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Joking about how she is often compared to her father: "They used to say that I was Willy Chevalier without the mustache. Although I have a little bit of the mustache," and when asked how she is different than her father, she responds "I have tits, no penis" (Gerhard 32). Her show "A Line Around the Block" is about her relationship with her father. Gomez mixes Spanish with English to portray how her father talked: "'Don't lose your sense of [c]humor.' He had this slight Cuban accent 'cuzz he was Cuban and he never forgot his roots, he always made us observe all the Cuban traditions that he made up [laughter]. Like every year on the day that Castro took power the whole family would gather round the dining room table and ration the meat [laughter]. Then we'd go for a long dangerous boat ride [laughter].

Gomez explains her father's name Maurice Chavelier was a stage name he had taken from a French movie star who used to sing "Mimi Rofalage you look like a scene, Mimi! Oh you should want it Mimi!" which is where Gomez got her nickname Mimi. Gomez jokes "that would be a cute story if we didn't recently learn that Maurice Chavelier was a Nazi informer pig" [laughter]. Her show "Memory Tricks" is about her mother who was prevented from being an actress because of her accent and instead became a scantily clad

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dancer. Gomez' show "Marga Gomez Is Pretty, Witty, and Gay" is about her experiences and perspectives as a lesbian Latina.

La Raza Cosmica

> So ends the scene of El Jardin
> A Chicano version of the Fall of Man
> This mixed breed of New World people
> Indian, Spanish, Negro
> Are seeing visions of their own
> Which will someday melt with the dreams of others
> To form a truly Cosmic Race
>
> Carlos Morton's "El Jardin" (26)

"El Jardin" is a Chicano parody of Adam and Eve (Adan and Eva) in the Garden of Eden (El Jardin) where "all creation blends real nice". Many truths and realities become evident in their encounters with God (Dios), the Serpent, Columbus, the Church, and a Texas Ranger. Nobody except God is sacred. Chicano identity is the central issue for Adan and Eva as they share their weaknesses, strengths, views, and decisions. Eva advocates organization and political action.

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Adan is prepared to do whatever is necessary. Dios acknowledges their multiracial visions as the precursor of a truly Cosmic Race capable of transcending monolithic racial, cultural, and national boundaries.

Morton's "Rancho Hollywood" asserts a mestizaje inclusive of all races. The characters challenge a directors attempt to type cast "olde Spanish Californios" as white. The director is upset because he thinks Rico is too dark to be cast as a Spaniard father of a fiery Spanish Californio played by Ramona. The actors give the director a lesson in Chicano heritiage and colorism. Rico explains "even if I am as dark as a Moor, I could still be Ramona's father" which leads to the following discussion:

> Victoria: That's right, Ramona is a mestiza.
>
> Director: A what?
>
> Victoria: A mestiza. Half and half. If I, as her mother, am fair, and the father is dark, then the child is like cafe con leche. . . that is what the Mexican people are, a mixture of Spanish and Indian.
>
> Rico: And Arab and Jewish and African . . . (7).

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As America becomes increasingly diverse, impediments to a Cosmic Race such as racism, ethno-centrism, xenophobia, English-only laws, and anti-immigration laws continue to be targets of Latino satire.

Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez Pena are self-described "Border Warriors" fighting for a borderless world. Their performance-radio script "Norte:Sur" is a parody of an American radio program about "America's changing cultural identity." Fusco and Gomez-Pena discuss colonialism, racism, and how their identities change according to situational factors. They are consistently interrupted by the announcer (who neither understands nor seems to be interested in what they are saying), commercials, news updates, and announcements.

> MJ: And we have Coucou Fusco, a Cuban living in New York.
>
> CF: My name is Coco Fusco, and actually, I was born in the U.S. and am genetically composed of Yoruba, Taino, Catalan, Separdic, and Neopolitan blood. In 1990, that makes me Hispanic. If this were the `50s, I might be considered black.

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MJ: How romantic!

GG-P: Would you believe that one of my grandmothers was part German and part British? During the `40s, she wrote bilingual poetry in Mexico City, but no one was into that sort of thing back then. My other grandparents had a mixture of Spanish and Indian blood.

MJ: Fascinating, but I'm afraid we have to go back to our subject. Coco, how do you think that our personal story makes you part of America?

They continue to address problems of racism, colorism, segregation, separatism, and the census. The announcer belittles their assertions about discrimination and tries to say the country is no longer racist. Fusco explains to him that when she grew up in the 1960s "segregation had been supplanted by separatism. No one was into the idea of `mixed race.'" Fusco "always marked Other" because "Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans hadn't been lumped together yet" [as Hispanic]. The announcer suggests that the category

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"Hispanic" put an end to both Fusco's and Gomez-Pena's problems and helps Americans understand who they are. He cuts short Fusco's questions regarding his race, ethnicity, and ancestry as a white American and closes the discussion by announcing that next week's show will be about indigenous basket weaving traditions at the Tex-Mex border. Commercials advertise "affordable prices for the cultural Other": "A muscular mestizo in Tijuana, only $25. A mulata beauty in Havana, only $35. A Nuyorican [New York Puerto Rican] in Los Sures, only $15." A female voice with a Spanish accent comments on the high number of Latin American women that dye their hair blond. A female voice with an American accent responds "They are not the only ones who do that sort of thing. I've seen more than a few gringas progresistas [white liberal women] who wear huaraches and huipiles." The first female exclaims "OK, OK, I get it; so everybody wants to be the other. Is that the point?" The second says "Or sleep with them" [laughter]. (Fusco 175).

Gomez-Pena's book The New World Border: Prophecies, poems, and loqueras for the end of the century (1994) envisions "a multicentric, hybrid American culture" "that speaks at least ninety different languages and--unwillingly--hosts peoples from practically every nation, race, and religious creed on earth" (I):

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I see a whole generation

freefalling toward a borderless future

incredible mixtures beyond science fiction:

cholo-punks, pachuco krishnas,

Irish concheros, butoh rappers, cyber-Aztecs,

Gringofarians, Hopi rockers, y demas . . .

I toast to a borderless future

(I raise my glass of wine toward the moon)

with . . .

our Alaskan hair

our Canadian head

our U.S. torso

our Mexican genitalia

our Central American cojones

our Caribbean sperm

our South American legs

our Patagonian feet

our Antarctic nails

jumping borders at ease

jumping borders with pleasure

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amen, hey man (1-3).

Embodied in comic figures, sketch comedy, standup, and performance art, laughter de la Raza Cosmica brings to life the experiences, identities, and worldviews of Chicano/Latino peoples struggling to transcend geo-political, cultural, and racial borders and boundaries posed by Anglo-American cultural domination. Providing an alternative to dominant negative portrayals, Chicano/Latino comedy asserts the multicultural survival and adaptation of the mestizo with a proud indigenous past.

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Chapter Five

NATIVE AMERICAN MIXED BLOOD COMEDIANS

> My father was one-eighth Cherokee and my mother was a quarter-blood Cherokee. I never got far enough in arithmetic to figure out just how much "Injun" that makes me, but there's nothing of which I am more proud than my Cherokee blood.--Will Rogers[1]

The immensely popular turn-of-the-century comedian Will Rogers proudly asserted his partial Indian heritage at a time when it was unacceptable to express partial black ancestry. Euro-Americans accepted interracial mixing between whites and Native Americans to a much greater degree than between whites and African Americans. They were not concerned about mixing between non-white groups, which especially occurred among Native Americans and African Americans.[2] Anti-miscegenation laws were primarily created to prevent intermarriage between blacks and whites, especially black men and white women. After American Indians had been nearly exterminated, they ceased to be perceived as a threat to white supremacy. The image of the noble savage elevated the status of

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partial Indian ancestry. William J. Scheick writes in The Half-Blood: A Cultural Symbol in 19th-Century American Fiction (1979) that mixed bloods of Indian ancestry were accepted because of the convention of the noble savage and the belief that the Indian was becoming extinct. However, while whites no longer viewed Indians as a threat, they saw blacks as a growing threat to society.[3]

According to Richard Ketchum, the high rate of mixture between whites and Cherokees led some to call the Cherokees "'white Indians'"[4] With the close of the frontier period in the late nineteenth century, for Euro-Americans partial Indian ancestry came to symbolize America's romanticized frontier past. While full blood Indians were viewed as children of nature destined to a tragic end as civilization tamed nature, mixed bloods were seen as having the necessary wit and intelligence from their white side to survive.[5]

During the twentieth-century whites, while it was not considered acceptable for Euro-Americans to acknowledge partial black ancestry, they could say with some pride that they were "part Indian" especially if it was several generations removed from initial miscegenation.[6] Such a racial context was conducive to Will Roger's becoming one of the most beloved figures of his time, expressing himself as a performer in vaudeville and the Ziegfeld Follies, in silent and talking pictures, radio, and as a newspaper columnist. Born in

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1879 and raised on a ranch in The Indian Territory (now Oklahoma), his boyhood symbolized the nostalgic ideal of the nineteenth-century rural American frontier.[7]

Indians were viewed as witty, satirists, and jokesters in colonial times when white Americans used Indians as a reference point in their attempts to distance themselves from colonial Britain.[8] However, after the early nineteenth-century Indians became viewed as threats to the mandates of Manifest Destiny and Westward expansion.[9] With large tribes conquered and relocated to reservations during the nineteenth century, Indians became viewed as a tragic vanishing race.[10] With Indians no longer seen as a serious threat, romantic images of Indians became popular again, although viewed as noble more than comic. Indian burlesque or redface became a vaudeville standard in the twentieth century.[11] Indians were viewed as reserved. In contrast, since the mid-nineteenth century, Irish and Jews dominated blackface, vaudeville and other areas of comic entertainment. Irish had an established comic image springing from their low socio-economic educational status as the largest group of new immigrants in the U.S. during the nineteenth century. Irish blackface performers drew on the low-comedy traditions of the British stage (Rogin 1996). Seen as stupid, irrational, blunderers as recent immigrants during the mid-

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eighteenth century, turn of the century and early twentieth-century Irish emerge as comic and witty masters of irrationality. Newer European immigrant ethnic groups such as Poles and Finns were ascribed roles of stupidity in ethnic jokes.[12]

Rogers joked about his ancestries by combining stereotypical imagery:

> . . . Ireland. That is where some of my folks come from. There is a fine breed for you, Irish-Indian. Ziegfeld says I have a touch of Hebraic in me too. Which would make me an Irish, Jewish, Indian.
>
> My crest would in that case be, a Shilalah with a Tomahawk on one end, and a percent sign (%) on the other. [March 27, 1932][13]

While his Irish heritage was viewed as comic, Rogers Indian side was perceived to make his humor more dignified. P.J. O'Brien writes in Will Rogers: Ambassador of Good Will, Prince of Wit and Wisdom (1935):

> Regardless of genetics and the Mendelian Law, Will Rogers undoubtedly drew upon all three strains, Irish, Scotch, and American Indian, to fashion the character

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> that was so beloved by the world. From the Irish came his sense of humor, roguish as it was, and his great, generous heart. The Scotch added a keen sense of business and forthrightness, and from the Indian came the dignity and reserve that prevented him as the Nation's jester from descending to the level of a merry-andrew.

Rogers began his comedy career as a vaudeville style cowboy dubbed "The Cherokee Kid". Featured as a champion rope trick artist, he inserted one liners and social commentary between tricks. While the bulk of his material was from his perspective as an "American," Rogers showed strong pride in his Indian ancestry and made fun of Euro-American pride. He told a Daughters of the Revolution (D.A.R.) audience: "My ancestors didn't come over in the Mayflower--they met the boat."[14] He described his birthplace as "halfway between Claremore and Oologah, before there was a town in either place" and claimed Claremore for convenience, because "nobody but an Indian can pronounce Oologah." Rogers used himself to joke about Indian-white relations. During his school days in Oklahoma where most of his classmates were full-blooded Indians: "I had just enough white in me to make my honesty questionable."[15] Rogers went on to become

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a regular newspaper humor columnist in Hollywood. Maintaining his rural identity through his fame, Rogers wrote "I am just an old country boy in a big town trying to get along . . . I have been eating pretty regular and the reason I have is, I have stayed an old country boy." [16] Much of Rogers' country boy character of modest means could be considered a persona since his father was a wealthy rancher.

Contemporary Mixed Blood Standup Comedians

The importance of Indian identities among mixed blood comedians of today ranges from a minimal to a significant aspect of their stage personas and routines. Jonathan Winters is currently the most prominent Indian mixed blood comedian. Winters has numerous records. Despite the common knowledge that he is of partial Indian descent, he does almost no Indian material, and no material addressing his mixed heritage.

Abel Silvas, of Ajachamen and Spanish/Mexican American descent, grew up in San Diego vaguely aware of his Native American birthright. His Native heritage was not a distinguishing feature of his initial performances. Silvas began improvising mime acts in 1979 during the daytime at the Chula Vista mall in the traditional white face and gloves. At comedy clubs in the night-time he walked on

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stage with a beer in hand and would (pretend to) twist the bottle top in his eye socket and exclaim "that's my opener". "What's wrong? Isn't that how you do it? Or maybe you prefer to do it like this [bends over and pretends to twist bottle in his rear]".

Studying mime under the direction of French master Marcel Marceau at the University of Michigan in 1994 inspired Silvas to replace his white grease-paint and gloves with material and characters from his Native heritage. Marceau encouraged students to "reach down into your own roots," and told Silvas "`You're Native American, right?' `Yeah.' `Well, you should go back to your people because your people always communicated in mime.'" Silvas wrote to the Bureau of Indian Affairs and found out he was Juaneno.

Tracing his roots, he learned his tribe the Ajachamen (pronounced "Ahashamem") was one of California's earliest pre-Spanish native tribes. They were enslaved by Spanish missionaries at the Mission San Juan Capistrano and given the name Juaneno. He also learned that California Indians in particular used mime as a medium to communicate across the six different California language groups. Collecting regional native tales from books, relatives, tribal elders, and historical accounts, Silvas developed characters that reflect his California Indian heritage.

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In his show "Running Grunion: `Southern California Native Storyteller'" Silvas performs the character of Old Man Running Grunion dressed in rabbit furs and shells who makes his living as a native storyteller. In the show Silvas enacts Native, Spanish, and Mexican characters through mime, storytelling, and comedy to portray how his people lived in pre-colonial, Spanish, Mexican, and American eras as disputes, borders, divisions, and resolutions occur between his people. [17]

Silvas' describes himself as a "Native American/Californio" in his promotional material for his "Running Grunion" show. The last page has a picture of himself walking on the beach with a surfboard, headband, and rabbit furs around his waist accompanied by a Native youth carrying a boogie board beside the words "Native American Storyteller" and words of praise from Marcel Marceau.

Silvas' success with Running Grunion led him to start a children's mime troupe on the Viejas Indian Reservation to prepare them to perform for other schools and cultural celebrations such as San Diego's annual Grunion Festival which Silvas founded to acknowledge California Native traditions. According to Silvas "mime is a universal language that everyone can understand, especially here in San Diego where we have different backgrounds."[18]

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Silvas traced his Spanish family's origins to the first Silvas who came from Europe to California in 1776. The Silvas family built the first adobe home in Del Mar in 1831, and his great grandfather started the first taxi service in San Diego in the 1890s. Silvas developed an"acto" based on his interpretation of the California "Rancho" era in which he portrays his great great Uncle, Jose Antonio Silvas "a true romantic Californio" whose past is both intriguing and controversial. Donning a Mexican army uniform and using various props, such as a shaker percussion instrument to represent his American Indian heritage, Silvas recreates his ancestor's exploits when Mexico became a country by declaring independence from Spain. While Silvas mainly performs as Native characters for events featuring Native heritage such as the Annual Grunion Festival, and Spanish/Mexican characters for the Annual Mexican Independence Day celebration, as a standup comedian for multiethnic comedy club audiences Silvas performs as himself, a mixed blood jokester clad in T-shirt and jeans who also teaches aerobics, mime, and storytelling.

Comedians may switch between or embrace multiple heritages. "Beecher" Sykes, of Otami and Mexican descent, has spent most of his life in the Palo Alto, San Jose, San Francisco, and the surrounding Bay Area. He initially began doing standup as a Mexican "Cholo" character with a black leather jacket, black pants, black gloves, black

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sunglasses, hair slicked back, a boom box radio, and spoke in a high voice. He established a Mexican persona with jokes such as "I'm Mexican which you may not believe since I'm six foot tall and don't have a mustache (laughter)," "I can tell you're surprised to see me on stage, not in the kitchen (laughter)," and "a lot of people say Mexicans are lazy. That's not true, you try smoking a big doob and see if you feel like working." Beecher says he was just trying to say that Mexicans are just like everyone else. Recalling his Cholo garb, Sykes reflects "I think the Cholo character was a disguise I was hiding behind." He also recalls how some people didn't like his Cholo character, even though others had laughed. One club owner asked him "could you be a little less Mexican so people could have something to relate to?" Another manager told him he was afraid of Mexicans. The general acceptance of and positive feedback for his Indian identity over his Mexican persona led "Beecher" Ed Sykes to perform his routine entirely as an Indian. According to Beecher, a lot of people feel threatened by Mexicans whom they see as illegal immigrants taking their jobs. He believes they have more empathy for Indians because they think of Indians as existing in the past or far away rural areas rather than in urban areas.[19] He jokes about showing his mother a history book with an old picture of an Otomi woman captioned "The sophisticated Otomi girl wearing a hat and

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shawl" "I'm like `Mom, what are you doing in this picture?' since it looks like her" (laughter). Beecher gets away with saying critical things about whites when he performs as an Indian much more than as a Mexican: "people emphathize with Indians. Blacks will come to me afterwards and say `I can really relate to the hardships of your people' and whites will apologize and I'll tell them, `well you didn't do it.'"

For some comedians ethnicity may play a secondary role to other aspects of their identity they emphasize in their routines. This is often true for female comedians. Rebecca Ward is of Cherokee descent on her father's side. She has lived in Louisville, Kentucky; Santa Monica, California; Nabb, Indiana; Branton, Missouri; and San Francisco where she has done standup for ten years. Although she has a few Indian jokes, most of her routine involves issues she deals with as a woman such as insecurities over body image or clothes, dating men, or life as a mother of two kids. Ward says she bases her Indian jokes primarily on what she thinks non-Indians stereotypically think of Indians. She introduces her Indian heritage with "I should tell you a little about myself. I'm part Indian. Part Cherokee. My dad's half Indian and half Irish, so it's kind of a family tradition that every St. Patrick's Day we go out and scalp concert tickets" (laughter). "Dad was kind of cheap, half the time he'd pay

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our allowance in beads and trinkets" (laughter). "I'm part Indian but my husband isn't. So every time we play monopoly he likes to get me drunk and steal my properties a little bit at a time, ha, ha" (laughter). The concept of this joke is never far from the surface of Indian humor about whites.

Ward explains that her grandfather lived on a reservation in Oklahoma. Recalling how their local radio stations only played country music, she says "there's actually a country song called `You're the Reason God Made Oklahoma' (laughter). Is that supposed to be a compliment?! (laughter) Isn't that kinda' like saying `you're the reason God made Bakersfield or Fresno?' (laughter) "We used to visit my grandfather on the reservation in Oklahoma. People sometimes ask me what Oklahoma is like in the winter. Imagine a meat locker but it's a little colder and a lot less interesting" (laughter). Our high school dances were never successful since it was mostly an Indian population. We'd get rained out every time we started dancing" (laughter).

Ward believes it is difficult for women to become successful standups, especially if they have kids, because it's harder for them to "hang out with the guys"--the mostly male comedians, managers, and club owners--and as a mother difficult to cater to the unpredictable and late night schedules of comedy clubs.

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Establishing self-identities helps standups open audiences to their way of seeing things. In turn, making jokes about themselves or their own ethnic groups ingratiates themselves with their audiences and increases their ability to make fun of the dominant group. Otherwise, disparaging the dominant group would be too antagonistic.[20]

Multiethnicity

Jokes about interethnic marriage and offspring are a staple of ethnic humor[21] Such multiethnic jokes work well with urban audiences since urban populations tend to be demographically mixed. The most common multiethnic jokes rely on the premise of describing mixed offspring in terms of the combined stereotypical traits of the parents' ethnicities.

Charlie Hill, a prominent comedian of Oneida descent, jokes about mixed bloods "We get interesting things when we get mixed bloods. I met a guy on the way over, he goes "Ya know, I'm Chickasaw, Potawatomi, and Paiute" I guess that makes him a Chicken-Pot-Pie (laughter). I met a guy he was Jewish and his wife was Indian they named their son "Bargain Hunter" (laughter). In my own family I have relatives that are Irish and Indian--there's no drinking problem in that family, ha, ha! (laughter).

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The first joke is a word play based on combining sounds from each of the tribal names to make it sound like a food item. The second joke combines ethnic stereotypes of Jews being stingy with money and Indians naming children with nature motifs. The third joke combines stereotypes of both Irish and Indians as having drinking problems. He follows with a joke that brings together African Americans and Native Americans as dispossessed peoples: "I met some of the most beautiful people in America that are of African and Indian heritage, and boy are they strong people because not only did they get their land stolen, they gotta work on it for free (laughter). But bless everyone from the Rainbow that came here this evening."

Silvas applies the premise of multiethnic jokes to an opener about being a Mission Indian. "I'm California Indian. I'm a Missionary Indian from the Ajachamen tribe--can you say it? [audience repeats `Ahashamen'] Bless you! -- [blank looks] that's a Mission joke" (laughter). Playing upon the audiences assumption that Mission Indians must be doubly serious as Christianized Indians, Silvas breaks the tension by revealing that the joke is on the audiences' seriousness. This opens the way for Silvas to explain that Ajachamen or "Juaninos" are Indians who were enslaved at the Mission, where members of his family still live.

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Silvas jokes about his "color" as a person of mixed descent "I'm a California Indian. Actually I'm half California Indian on my dad's side and my mom's side is Mexican, so that makes me `rust'" (laughter). On the color wheel of race, red symbolizes Indians and brown symbolizes Mexicans, therefore, by the premise of a mixed race joke rust would symbolize admixture of Indian and Mexican (notwithstanding that Mexicans are already of mixed Indian and Spanish ancestry).

Silvas is trying to include Indian and Spanish peoples in San Diego's public Old Town history. As a board member of Protectors of Historic Sites, he is challenging the California State Park's plan to build an American style visitors center in Old Town over the remains of historic Spanish and Indian home sites. Silvas jokes about being the "underground tour guide" for a group of State officials who "seemed disappointed because there was nothing to see" since the historic sites are all buried:

> I'm the underground tour guide for the Protectors of Historic Sites. We located old Spanish and Native American historical sites beneath San Diego's Old Town Historic State Park. But we're having a hard time getting the state to recognize the sites. I gave these officials a

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> tour but I think they were disappointed because they couldn't see anything because it's all buried. I'm standing with this map and pointing "buried over there is an adobe house built by my great grandfather Silvas in the 1820s, and over there is a site that was occupied for several thousand years by Kumeyaay Indians."

Addressing global issues or placing local concerns in global contexts is a common feature of Native American humor.[22] Multiethnic jokes often serve as a bridge to jokes that emphasize commonalties shared by different groups. Shared indigenous heritage among different groups can serve as a premise for such jokes.

In mixed audiences, Hill asks if there are any Latinos in the audience and (after applause) jokes "the Latinos, that's our first cousins. We've been here since before the white people in Europe were trying to figure out if they were monkeys. The Spanish came here in fifteen-hundred and the Mexicans came nine months later" (laughter). Embracing Latinos/Mexicans in terms of shared indigenous roots, Hill then emphasizes shared history: "since there's Latinos here tonight I need to thank them for kicking Davy Crockett's ass! (laughter). Inverting the image of Davy Crockett as a heroic

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figure, Hill jokes "They always say `Oh, Davy Crockett he was a famous Indian fighter. That means, oh, he murdered people, in fact, he was a terrorist. What are we going to have fifty years from now? [sings] `Oh Omar, Oh Omar Khadaffi!'" (laughter)

In the context of San Diego, border issues are common topics of debate. Silvas builds empathy for border crossers. Recalling his childhood Silvas jokes "we used to play Cowboys and Indians and Mexicans. I used to play Mexican--`Aqui viene la migra!' [mimics running] which means `here comes the border patrol!'" (laughter). Through the character of Running Grunion Silvas explains that when the Spaniards came the Natives welcomed them but after time differences grew and borders were drawn that split people apart. Donning a red headband and plaid shirt, he impersonates Mexicans running to the sound of the "La Bamba" song (and laughter). He mimics climbing over a fence and being blinded by spot lights; he raises his hands then has them cuffed behind him. This border skit enacts how the border violates peoples' rights. "Since we were here before the border, we didn't cross the border--we were crossed by the border." He emphasizes that the border is the problem, not the border crossers. Moreover, his tribe was there before San Diego existed: "We didn't move to the city--the city moved to us, ha, ha."

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Hill establishes similarities among American Indians and Hawaiians. At a Native American benefit in which Hawaiian musicians participated, Hill bonds with Hawaiians by saying "Aloha to the Hawaiians, and I love the Hawaiian people. They're the same as us. The only difference between the Hawaiians and the Indians here is the Ocean, and that's the only thing, that's it, the same thing." Hill makes comparisons "they have their medicine people and we have our medicine people. They have their tragedies like us. We have Wayne Newton. They've got Don Ho" (laughter). "The Hawaiians when they say hello they say Aloha, when they leave and when the come. The government has messed them up so much they don't know if they're comin' or goin'!" (laughter). Establishing common grounds across ethnic groups creates a collective sense of we-ness.

Mocking the Dominant

Silvas demonstrates how he can play on audiences' misconceptions about the meaning of "Native" in the following exchange:

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Silvas: So where's all the Native Californians? (cheers)

Silvas: From what tribe dude? (laughter)

Audience member: Sioux.

Silvas: That's not California, man, I'm saying I'm Native Californian Indian (laughter).

Based on the wide use of the term "native" by people who were born in California, the punch line "from what tribe?" asserts the indigenous meaning of "Native." The response "Sioux" turns the joke back on Silvas whom, in turn, outwits by replying that Sioux is not a California tribe.

Given the dominant perception that Indians are humorless and tragic peoples,[23] the very existence of Indian standup comedians challenges stereotypes of Indians as not having a sense of humor. Comedians can also play upon the rarity of audiences seeing Indian standups. Beecher jokes about Indian humor "A lot of people think this comedy boom has only been in the past ten or twenty years. But that's not true, you see Indians used to do standup way back before there even was a United States of America. The history books tell you that Indians were a bunch of wandering nomads following the buffalo. But actually what they were doing was going from village to village putting on comedy shows." To "re-enact a Native American

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comedy show," Beecher turns his back to the audience, loosens his ponytail, and turns to audience with long hair covering half his face. In a markedly lower and exaggerated stereotypically "Indian" tone of voice he begins "How (pause) is everybody doing tonight? (laughter) It's good to see everybody at the Club Minnehaha (laughter). Last time I was here, I really massacred the place (laughter). This place is really packed tonight. You must have made reservations (laughter). . . My name is Wind in His Drawers, let me tell you about myself . . . " He makes a series of jokes about Indian life and white people from the perspective of an Indian standup from a rural past. Resuming his routine as a modern urban Indian standup, Beecher emphasizes that Wind in His Drawers is an impersonation. Beecher mocks a woman who mistook Wind in Drawers as a "real" Indian "true story--this woman comes up to me after a show in Sacramento and says `Wind,' like she knows me, `do Native Americans find white people as hard to understand as white people find Native Americans?' I said `what do you mean?'" (laughter) Humor arises from the ridiculousness of someone believing that Wind in His Drawers was a "real" Indian.

Mainstream portrayals of Indians are a common source of humor for Indian standups. Hill draws upon his experiences as a Hollywood actor.

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> "Dances With Wolves"--that was a good movie because the Indian actors were in it--that's what made it for me. I was in "Dances With Wolves" But they took my part out--pissed me off!--"overacting" you know. I'd never been in a movie where the Indians won the battle! I was grabbing white people over my shoulder, they were going "Cut! Cut!" and I'm grabbin' and slashin' I didn't care what the script said--I was fightin' god damn it! Turns out the guy wasn't even in the movie either--he was the guy with the lunch wagon--I didn't have my glasses on" (laughter).

Hill's joke brings the audience to imagine what an Indian might think of the constraints having to follow a non-Native script. He also reveals how the image of Indians as not wearing glasses is neither realistic nor practical by joking about how not wearing his glasses can create problems while on the set. "One time I saw the White Buffalo and I put these [glasses] on and it was Marlon Brando" (laughter).

Hill makes fun of Russell Means--a once militant leader of the American Indian Movement--having his Indian jewelry checked by

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airport security. "I saw Russell Means at the airport, it took him twenty minutes to take off all his jewelry (laughter). I mean, where's an Indian going to hijack a plane to anyway? `Take me to Oklahoma!'" (laughter). Hill jokes about Means' transformation from a symbol of Red Power to a movie actor:

> When I was a young guy in college Russell Means was a bad dude. Now he's a bad actor. I was listening to him the other day and he said "it's a good day to die". Yeah, I didn't know he was talking about dying his damn hair, Jesus Christ! (laughter). "Pocahantas", ha, I saw Russell Means in the "Last of the Mohicans, to me that's like watching Malcolm X in "Happy Days". I'm sorry, he ruined his credibility. Now they have the Pocahantas doll. They should make a Russell Means doll. You wind it up and every six months it quits the American Indian movement (laughter).

Cultural Critique

Standup comedians often serve the role of cultural critics. Stephanie Koziski writes that standup comedians take the role of "cynical outsiders" "viewing their own culture in the way an

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anthropologist approaches an alien culture."[24] Given the dominant society's marginalization of Native Americans, the role of cultural critic easily accompanies Native perspectives.

Beecher is critical of the dominant assumption that American means the United States or white. "It's very complicated being who I am. People look at me and ask, `are you Indian?' to which I reply, `Yup." Are You Mexican? Si Are you Spanish: Uh huh. . . when people just ask, `what are you?' I say "American' which really seems to confuse them. They seem to forget that America is a continent not a country . . . when I'm being really pissy and someone asks me what I am I say "Californian". Beecher explains that many of the names of states and cities across the country--Oklahoma, Minnesota, Wichita, Kansas, Winnebego, Massachusetts, Ohio, Wyoming Utah, Tennessee, Tacoma, Manhattan, Napa, Sonoma, etcetera-- are Native names rather than English names reflect their prior existence as Indian lands. "When the `settlers' were migrating across the country they would meet the people that were already there and, being lost, one of the first things they'd ask is "where are we?" or "what do you call this place?" To which you might get the reply, "Arkansas" or "Idaho". "White folks need to learn that they are not the only ones on the planet" Beecher chides "Right now we are getting a lot of rhetoric that people should go back to where they came from. OK fine. Let's

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go with that Everyone go back to where they came from Whites are not native to America, Hawaii, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia. Work with us because you owe us a lot. If not go back to where you came from pilgrim."

Making fun of New Agers, Hill jokes "You get this a lot in the Bay Area: `I was an Indian in a previous life.' `But not now, so get out of my driveway!" (laughter). Hill makes an appeal to New Agers to quit appropriating Native traditions:

> And all the New Agers stop pimpin' our religions and our ceremonies. You can pray with us in our circles but you need to figure out who you are. This Lynn Andrews bullshit, or this guy Swift Deer--we call him Fast Buck. Anytime you see a medicine man with a 900 number run (laughter). We talk to our ancestors with our ceremonies. White people can't talk to their ancestors with our ceremonies. It's impossible because they're the ones who killed them (laughter). So relax, find out who you are. Then we can all get healed together.

Taking a crack at mainstream political orientations, Hill gibes "last week I did a show for the American Indian Republican Party.

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Three of the nicest gentlemen I ever met in my life" (laughter). Putting liberals in perspective, he quips "liberals aren't quite sure about Indians: `Oh, we love the Indians.' Then give us back our land! `Okay, we're not that liberal (laughter).'" This joke challenges the self-righteousness of liberals who consider themselves friends of "the Indian" but are unwilling to correct a status quo in which much of white privilege is based upon historical dispossession of Indians. Hill jokes about people who are offended by his humor "I had a heckler last night. I know I shouldn't judge a man by the color of his neck or anything like that, but he said `I don't want to hear any of that crap, I'm an American god damn it, why don't you go back to where you came from?' So I camped in his back yard" (laughter).

After joking about white tourists who flock to reservations and ask dumb questions such as "what Indian tribe was the fiercest" or "can I take your picture?" (laughter), Hill exclaims "we Indians ought to be tourists in the suburbs in a white neighborhood and see how they like it: `Are you really white people? Godamn! Can I take your picture? How do you survive in these suburbs? My god!'" (laughter).

Having lived in Los Angeles off-and-on for the past twenty years, Hill exclaims "there's so much crime in Los Angeles, the women, this is how they rock a baby to sleep at night [makes siren

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sound]" (laughter). Third-graders bring handguns to school. Third-graders with handguns, when I was in third grade all we shot spit wads" (laughter).

Most Native Americans currently live in urban areas. However because of the prevalence of portrayals relegating Indians to a rural past, some people still consider urban life to be the antithesis of Indian-ness. Hill jokes:

> I met another tourist one time, he said "like, you know, like, my dad is Indian man." This really threw me because they always talk about their grandmother or something. I said "that means you're Indian then, man, be proud of who you are, damn it." He said "oh no, man, I just, like, live out here in L. A. and I don't practice Indian." How do you practice being an Indian? "Yeah, uh, I've got Indian practice tonight" (laughter).

Drew Hayden Taylor is a Native Canadian comedy writer and actor. His comedy The Bootlegger Blues won the Canadian Authors Award for Drama. His most recent play Only Drunks and the Children Tell the Truth was given a Dora Award for most outstanding new play in 1995. He is currently writing a television movie for CBC. In Funny

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You Don't Look Like One: Observations from a Blue-Eyed Ojibway (1996) Taylor addresses his experiences as an Ojibway from the Curve Lake Reserve in Ontario who looks white. He introduces himself by explaining he is touched by how Kermit the Frog sings and if he could sing his song would be "It's Not Easy Having Blue Eyes in a Brown Eyed Village." He says that underneath his blue eyes, fair skin, light brown hair, and noticeable lack of cheek bones, "there lies the heart and spirit of an Ojibway storyteller." "You see, I'm the product of a White father I never knew, and an Ojibway woman who evidently couldn't run fast enough." Because of his Caucasian features as a child other Indians thought he was white: "Whenever we played cowboys and Indians, guess who had to be the bad guy (the cowboy)?" Taylor philosophizes about his racial mixture:

> I have both White and Red blood in me. I guess that makes me pink. I am a "Pink Man." Try to imagine this: I'm walking around on any typical reserve in Canada, my head held high, proudly announcing to everyone, "I am a Pink Man." It's a good thing I ran track in school.
>
> My pinkness is constantly being pointed out to me over and over and over again. "You don't look Indian." "You're not Indian, are you?" "Really?!" I got questions

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> like that from both White and Native people. For a while I debated having my Status card tattooed on my forehead.

He rejects the idea that he is "simply a Metis with a Status card" because he sees Metis as a cultural identity comprised of a synthesis of French and western Canadian indigenous cultures. "I failed French in grade 11" and "the Metis as everyone knows, have their own separate and honorable culture, particularly in western Canada. And, of course, I am well aware that I am not the only person with my physical characteristics."

Taylor discusses his favorite traits of Native North Americans and Euro-American cultures: Natives have respect for Elders, and love of the land; and white culture has Italian food and breast implants. He jokes:

> So where does that leave me on the big philosophical score board: What exactly are my choices again? Indians--respect for Elders, love of the land. White people-food and big tits. In order to live in both cultures I guess I'd have to find an Indian woman with big tits

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> who lives with her grandmother in a cabin out in the woods and can make Fettuccini Alfredo on a wood stove.

In response to a white man who tries to tell him its inappropriate to call Native Americans "Indian", he discusses the plethora of terms used to describe "the original inhabitants of this country."

> Status, non-Status, Metis . . . Indian, followed by Native, Aboriginal, Amerindian, Indigenous and First Nations. . . on-Reserve, off-Reserve, urban, treaty. . . enfranchised Indians, the Bill C-31 or re-instated people, the traditional Indians, the assimilated Indian . . . the wannabe's (the White variety), and of course the ever popular full bloods. My personal favorites are what I call the Descartes Indians, "I think Indian, therefore I am Indian."

He finds all these names can be confusing so he usually uses the term "Indian." "I'm just too busy or too lazy to find out which way the political wind is blowing or to delve deeply into the cultural/governmental background of who I'm talking to or writing

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about. By the time I go through all the above mentioned categories, I've missed my deadline. Then I become an unemployed Indian."

> But I know what you're thinking. Why should I listen to this guy? What the hell does he know? He's just probably some Status, off-reserve, urban, Native, Aboriginal, treaty, half-breed Indian. This week anyway.

Taylor jokes about starting his own racial group as a response to the constant questions about whether he is white or Indian.

> I've spent too many years explaining who and what I am repeatedly, so as of this moment, I officially secede from both races. I plan to start my own separate nation. Because I am half Ojibway and half Caucasian, we will be called the Occasions. And of course, since I'm founding the new nation, I will be a Special Occasion.

Indian mixed blood comedians expand the conception of Indians and mixed race. As comic crossbloods they subvert the concept of Indians and mixed bloods as tragic, stoically serious, and

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void of humor. Moreover, they ironically reveal racial groups to be permeable, changing, and sometimes absurd social constructions.

Endnotes

[1] In Kenneth Lincoln. Indi'n Humor: Bicultural Play in Native America (Nebraska: Nebraska University Press, 1993): 52.

[2] Jack Forbes Black Africans and Native Americans: Color, Race and Caste in the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, (1988). Terry P. Wilson "Blood Quantum: Native American Mixed Bloods" In Maria P. P. Root (Ed.) Racially Mixed People in America (California: Sage, 1992): 108-125.

[3] William J. Scheick The Half-Blood: A Cultural Symbol in 19th Century American Fiction (Kentucky: University of Kentucky: 1979): 85. "Unlike the declining red side of the half-blood, the black component of the mulatto reminded whites of what they regarded as the menace of black dominance . . . " (Scheick 1979): 85.

[4] Richard M. Ketchum Will Rogers: The Man and His Times (New York: American Heritage, 1973): 21.

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[5] Robert Easton writes of nineteenth century white perceptions of Indians: "wit and wisdom were qualities associated with civilization and, therefore, not to be expected from a `savage'" (183). Robert Easton "Humor of the American Indian" In Raymond Friday Locke (Ed.) The American Indian (Los Angeles: Mankind Publishing, 1970).

[6] Paul Spickard Mixed Blood: Intermarriage and Ethnic Identity in Twentieth-Century America (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989): 331.

[7] Ketchum (1973).

[8] Luise van Keuren "The Amrican Indian as Humorist in Colonial Literature" In Frank Shuffelton (Ed.) A Mixed Race: Ethnicity in Early America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993): 77-91.

[9] Robert Secor "Ethnic Humor in Early American Jest Books" In Frank Shuffelton (Ed.) A Mixed Race: Ethnicity in Early America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993): 163-193.

[10] The tragic, stoic, humorless "Indian" is the overriding image in literary, film, and television depictions of Native Americans. See Joseph Bruchac "Striking the Pole: American Indian Humor" Parabola 12:4 (Winter 1987): 22-29.

[11] See Michael Rogin Blackface, White Noise (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

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[12] Christie Davies Ethnic Humor Around the World (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

[13] See Reba Collins, http://www.wayport.com/rcollins/humor.htm

[14] Reba Collins, http://www.wayport.com/rcollins/humor.htm

[15] In Bryan B. Sterling The Best of Will Rogers (New York: Crown Publishers, 1979)

[16] In Richard M. Ketchum Will Rogers: The Man and His Times (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973): 5.

[17] Pauline Repard "Storyteller Preserves Native Lore" San Diego Union-Tribune Octover 22, 1993. Abel Silvas' "Running Grunion" character was the subject of "The Legend of Grandfather Running Grunion" produced by KPBS, 1992.

[18] "OB Actor's Historic Performances Highlight Old Town Celebration" Peninsula Beacon 13:6, September 15, 1994.

[19] However, Indians live in primarily urban areas. Indians have not always been accepted in California.

[20] See Christie Davies "Ethnic Jokes, Moral Values, and Social Borderlines," British Journal of Sociology 33 (1982).

[21] See John Lowe, "Theories of Ethnic Humor: How to Enter, Laughing" American Quarterly 38 (1986):439-60. However, mixed race identity has been historically constructed in popular culture as well as social

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science as a tragic situation. See Freda Scot Giles "From Melodrama to the movies: The Tragic Mulatta as a Type Character," Naomi Zack, ed. American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995). Michael Rogin explains blackface reinforced racial separation but allowed assimilation of European ethnic identities (Rogin 1996).

[22] Allan Ryan "Postmodern Parody: A Political Strategy in Contemporary Canadian Native Art" Art Journal 51:3 (Fall 1992): 59-65.

[23] See Kenneth Lincoln Indi'n Humor: Bicultural Play in Native America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[24] Stephanie Koziski, "The Standup Comedian as Anthropologist: Intentional Culture Critic," Journal of Popular Culture (Fall 1984)18:2; 57-76.

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Chapter Six
ASIAN AMERICAN HAPA HUMOR

> And now the secret Cool Eurasian Guy Club salute to our hero, Mr. Spock who, though not technically Eurasian, was a half-breed who served as a role model for an entire generation of Eurasian males [laughter].
> Michael Chih Ming Hornbuckle "Cool Eurasian Guy Club"

> I love Mr. Spock. I always identified with him when I was growing up because he was half-Vulcan and half-human! [laughter]
> Michael Chih Ming Hornbuckle "Hapa-land"

Hapa identity--a term adopted by people of partial Asian ancestry--is nearly invisible in American comedy. Most people in the United States have never seen an Asian American comedian, let alone a comedian of multiracial Asian descent. But why? And what is the significance of such comic invisibility? Multiracial Asian American identities are marginalized within popular culture for being of both mixed racial and Asian descent.

The dominant image of multiracial Asians is that of the tragic Amerasian bastard offspring of illicit sexual liasions between American soldiers and Asian prostitutes. Velina Hasu Houston writes

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in "To the Colonizer Goes the Spoils: Amerasian Progeny in Vietanam War Films and Owning Up to the Gaze": "an embarrassment to the White man who spewed forth his semen (most likely into a Vietnamese prostitute, or so the Western myth expounds), the `Amerasian" is percieved as a burdensome non-entity who lacks a viable future."[1]

Because of the monological categories of race and rules of hypo descent in the U.S., most multiracial Asian comedians are categorized as Asian or Asian American. One barrier Asian American comedians face is the prevalent perceptions that men of Asian descent are foreign, serious, hardworking, nerdy, and women are exotic, erotic, and subservient to the fantasies of white men--and not funny, except as the targets of jokes. The dominant perception that Asians don't have a sense of humor can be found in historical and contemporary accounts of Asians in America.

Although a number of Asian American comedians such as Margaret Cho, Henry Cho, and Tamayo Otsuki have gained exposure in the comedy industry, multiracial Asian identities remain for the most part remain invisible or subsumed within mono-ethnic identities. A number of comedians of multiracial Asian descent have performed as mono-racial/ethnic comedy characters. Japanese/Finnish Amy Hill acts as a mono-racially Korean

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grandmother in "All American Girl," which features Margaret Cho and is the only sitcom to feature an Asian American family. Similarly, sketch comedian Rob Schneider of "Saturday Night Live" is not recognizably of Asian descent by phenotype, nor by the characterizations he has performed on the show. Illustrating Schneider's invisibility as a multiracial Asian comedian, Andrew Brewer, Director of Program Standards at NBC responded to the Media Action Network for Asian Americans (MANAA) letter about the show's frequent use of white actors to mock Asian characters "incidentally, with regard to your remark that we should have Asians represented in the cast, you may not have known that Rob Schneider, who was with the show for many seasons, was Asian American, his mother being from the Philippines" (MANAA 1995). Although Schneider is phenotypically white in appearances to the point that he has no recognizable Asian features, Brewer applies the rule of hypo-descent[2] to classify him as Asian American.

There are a few multiracial Asian comedians who, while perhaps not necessarily emphasizing their heritages as an integral aspect of their comedy personas, have managed to get off a joke line about mixed heritage as sketch comedians. Tommy Chong of the popular "hippie" comedy duo "Cheech and Chong" has one joke line that identifies his partial Asian ancestry. Cheech asks him what he

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is and he responds "My father is Chinese and my mother is a waitress." Comedy writer/actor Michael Chih Ming Hornbuckle is one of the main writers and actors for "The 18 Mighty Mountain Warriors" which is billed as the world's largest Asian American sketch comedy group and is comprised of himself as well as Chinese American, Filipino American, Japanese American, and Korean American comedy writers and actors. Hornbuckle believes that as the only hapa member of the group it is his duty to write hapa skits. To date the group has incorporated two of his sketches involving Hapa identity.

The skit "Eros and Agape" focuses on an Asian American man and woman who are wondering whether an Asian American couple can ever have a successful romance. Cupid appears and says no, at which point the Asian American man says "But I'm only half Asian." Cupid summons Aphrodite who says the Asian American woman can spend half of her time with the Hapa and half of her time in hell with Maury Povich (Caucasian man married to Connie Chung).

In "Hapa-land" a blond-wigged talk show host named Colleen introduces three hapas "with wildly different outlooks on life." Furk Murphy is a "confused, low self-esteem Hapa with identity problems." Furk: "Hi, I guess" [laughter]. Susan Wang is "an angry, resentful hapa who is bitter and full of rage." Susan: "Hey, Fuck you!"

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[laughter] Matt Sau-ling Sunshine is a "happy Hapa". Matt: "Hi Colleen! isn't life great?" [laughter]. Colleen asks them to explain why they are so different.

Furk explains his frustration as "half-Asian in a society that values the white ideal" and "sees only my Asian-ness, but not my whiteness. I'm half-Asian and I'm so confused! [laughter] Furk doesn't know who his father is: "I have his photo here. If you see him tell him I'm looking for him" [laughter]. Susan responds militantly to Colleen's question about her being a "hapa":

> Susan: If you don't stop calling me Hapa, I'm going to sculpt your face into a mound of meat and blood [laughter]. I resent you bringing us on this show and putting us on display like zoo animals. I'm angry at having to explain my existence to assholes like you. And I'm bitter about the fucked up term Hapa! [laughter]
>
> Colleen: I thought you people liked to be called Hapa.
>
> Susan: Fuck you! You do not define me! Do not call me half-breed! Do not call me Mongrel! Do not call me

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Amerasian! Do not call me Hapa! I will define myself. From now on call me . . . Poopuhfukaroo! [laughter]

Matt explains he has no problems and life is great because he looks like Russell Wong, or Latino. Wolverine concludes "you are all FUCKED UP!" [laughter].

Everyone is upset, then a strange looking hapa wearing a fur hat and vest arrives and announces "I am Cholpon Uzelbov. And I have the solution to your problems." He tells Colleen, to not be angry with the Eurasians for "they live in a society where mixed race people are still not accepted. Even though every white person is part Cherokkee [laughter] white people still cannot understand the needs of mixed race people." He explains he has come to take them to a land where you they will be accepted: "Kazakastan!"

Cholpon points to a map and explains Kazakastan is a country o the border of Europe and Asia where everyone accepts Eurasians because everyone there is Eurasian. A country with "no racial problems because everyone is the same" and "all the men look like Russell Wong [applause] and all the women look like Asia Carrerra [applause]. As they depart Colleen says she wants to go also: "I have a confession to make. I am secretly ONE QUARTER ASIAN" [laughter]. They all exclaim "A QUAPPA?" Cholpon tells her then Kazakastan is

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not the place for her, and she must go to the country of Quappas: "Hollywood" [laughter] "then Hollywood is for you. Say hello to Dean Cain and Keanu Reeves" [laughter].

The skit addresses how definitions of hapa identity are relevant to personal experiences, and issues of group boundaries and exlusions. Hornbuckle considers "proper Hapas" to have one parent of Asian ancestry and one parent of non-Asian ancestry. The bit about whites being part Cherokee comes from his perspective of being one-thirty-second Cherokee but believing that a lot of people have pretended to be part Indian as a way to scam the government or gain some ethnic status. The ending comes from Hornbuckle's observation of the high number of Hollywood Eurasians of one fourth Asian ancestry who are touted by Asian Americans as being Asian Americans or Hapas on the basis of their partial Asian ancestry regardless of the actors personal identity preferences (neither Asian American or Hapa). The three hapas of the talk show resemble the attitudes of three common hapa types.

The low esteem hapa male and angry resentful hapa female figures are also featured in the skit "Hapa Love" by Darren Brown of the Hapa Performance Workshop. The skit is about a hapa dude's attempt to "pick up" a hapa girl at a bar. When the guy says they are both hapa in an attempt to establish some commonality, she

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responds "you may be happa but I'm not." When he asks "what are you then?" she responds "an alien you motherfucker [laughter]. After arguing for awhile over the issue of her identity and why she isn't sexually interested in him they both get mad at each other. Brown says the skit is based on his own experiences of not having much luck in dating Asian American or Hapa women who seem to prefer white guys.

Hornbuckle's skit "My Date With Amy Hill" has a similar theme involving a comic yet unsuccesful fantasy date with Amy Hill ending with them both agreeing they are unsuitable for each other. Hornbuckle wrote the skit in response to Hill writing in her web page that she has never dated an Asian American man because one has never asked her out. Beyond the issue of whether Asian women prefer white men, it responds to some people's assumption that hapas would make ideal partners on the grounds of having the same racial mix rather than personal compatibilities or preferences.

Issues of inclusion versus exlusion are also addressed in Hornbuckle's skit "Hapa Club" in which hapas argue over what constitutes "a proper hapa" and how to be an inclusive rather than exlusive group. The group welcomes mixed Asians of all quantums and heritages, as well as non-Asians who want to become members. A debate ensues over the introduction of Obie Walsh: "an extreme

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caricature of a white guy who's been hanging around Asian social circles. I've only known him one day and he's already asked my three sisters, my mother, and both my grandmothers for dates" [laughter]. Opie responds "That's right. White chicks repulse me, but I dig Oriental chicks. I'd like to meet Hapa chicks because most of them look pretty fucking Oriental to me. . . I want to fuck Hapa chicks." The skit is based on some of the problems the Hapa Issues Forum group at the University of California at Berkeley has encountered in trying to be as inclusive as possible.[3] Inclusiveness is stretched to an utmost absurdity when "Wolfman" a "half man, half wolf" yelling "Arrrgh! Arrrgh!" is introduced and chases everyone screaming off the stage.

Standing up

Despite the increasing numbers of people's of partial Asian descent, there are very few standup comedians who feature multiracial/ethnic Asian descent in their performances. There are two multiracial Asian American standup comedians in San Francisco who openly express their multiracial heritage as part of their performances--Mike Moto and Tessie Chua. Their expressions of multi-ethnic/racial identities range from impersonal stereotypical identity references to explanations of identity preferences. Their

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stage personas are related to their personal perspectives of their identities and roles as comedians.

Tessie Chua who is a part-time comedian in San Francisco overtly establishes her mixed heritage with the following joke: "in addition to being Chinese, I'm Filipino and Irish, which means I eat dog but only if I can wash it down with Guinness Stout!" This joke merely combines stereotypical traits of Filipinos as dogeaters and Irish as drinkers. This joke does not have much meaning beyond basically stating her ancestries. Chua's personal perspectives on identity reflect a similar disconnection with her ethnic heritages. Chua says she does not want to be categorized according to ethnicity.

> Why do I have to be identified in that ethnic way . . . I was born here, don't speak or identify with my ethnicity. I believe there's one race, the human race. I look Asian, but I don't feel Asian. I'm an American. I don't have a strong ethnic identity. We have to see ourselves as a global nationality, one race.

Although she grew up in San Francisco Chua says she doesn't identify with any one ethnic group because she never learned any languages except English.

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> I never specifically hung out with Chinese or Filipino people because I couldn't speak Chinese or Tagalog. I know I am Chinese and Filipino and I've got the name, but I don't feel Asian. I feel American. When I was little me and my sister would make fun of the way Filipinos speak. My father was half Filipino and half Chinese and my mother half Irish, half Filipino, and a small part Cherokee. My father wanted us to learn Tagalog but I wouldn't do it.

Rather than ethnicity or race, Chua identifies most closely with her angry disposition. "People come up to me and say `I like your stage persona'--that's not a persona--I'm an angry person and it comes out on stage." Initially trained as a character actor, Chua believes standup comedy allows her to validate her sense of self on stage: "applause in standup gives me validation of who I am. That's me up there, not just a personal. The angry person is the central character, not the sweet or docile." Chua says her anger is a result of having many bad experiences while living in New York City. Chua has a number of jokes based on stereotypical traits of Asians. However, she says her overriding characteristic is her anger. Typical of her

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humor, Chua jokes "By now you can tell I'm not Japanese because when a Japanese comedian bombs she's ashamed and loses face. When I bomb I'm pissed off that the audience is so fucking stupid!" Chua says that her primary goal as a comedian is to make people laugh: if people laugh, then it's a good joke."

It is a generally accepted rule in comedy that it is alright for comedians to make fun of the groups to which they belong to. However, many people of Asian descent are offended by Chua's jokes about dogeating or Asians being bad drivers even though Chua is of partial Asian descent. Observing how some Asians are offended by her jokes about dogeating, Chua jokingly told me "some Asians are offended by my jokes about dogeating, they're like `oh no, we don't eat dogs, we only eat cats! ha ha ha!" Chua says that although she doesn't think of herself as Chinese, it is an advantage to have a Chinese last name because she gets invited to perform for alot of Chinese community organizations.

Mike Moto is currently the only full-time working standup comedian in the country who features a multiracial Asian identity. Mike Moto introduces himself by joking "I come from a mixed marriage:

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> I'm half Japanese and half Yugoslavian. Folks, you can't make up shit this weird. I'm a Japoslavian!

Moto then reveals his ethnic affiliation as Japanese rather than Yugoslavian because of the lower status of Yugoslavia by joking

> I always lean toward my Japanese side. What's to admire about Yugoslavia? The country is a whole rubble because they attacked themselves. And there are no more Yugo cars in the U.S.. Try picking up a girl in a Yugo.

The first joke relies on the incongruity of combining the names of two ethnic groups. While the second joke is based on stereotypical images of Yugoslavians, it also asserts Moto's affiliation with his Japanese heritage over his Yugoslavian background.

In offstage discussions Moto has further explained why he prefers to be identified as Japanese rather than Yugoslavian. Symbolic of such a preference, he changed his last name from Morgin to Moto to emphasize his Japanese descent.

Moto says that a readily Asian identified stage name wasn't necessary when he started doing open mikes in San Francisco, but it

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was when he moved to the East Coast. "Anyone who looked like some kind of non-Euro ethnic person has to explain what they are. As a guy who looks Native American, Filipino, Hawaiian, East Indian, if I don't identify who I am they will sit there and wonder `what is this guy?'" Moto believes it is significant that he needed a stage name when he started doing comedy in the Boston and New York areas. He initially used Morgin but would be stopped by people who would ask "`what are you?'" He says he switched his name to an Asian identifiable one to make audiences more comfortable. To make it easier for everybody I had to make it obvious outside of California that I was Asian otherwise people would be uncomfortable. Unless they can figure it out, they are uncomfortable. People have to know what you are. I learned this in New York when a person stopped me in the middle of my show to say `what are you?' when I told him he said `okay, you can go on now.'"

Moto says his name change caused him mixed feelings because sometimes he wondered if people thought he was trying to "pass" as a "full blooded Japanese":

> When I first adopted the stage name I felt like I was passing because I didn't have any mixed race material. I felt like a fraud because I didn't mention both sides. I

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> was presenting myself as a full blooded Japanese. But the truth is I look more Hawaiian, or Native American, or Filipino, so Asian [Americans] would call me on it. They'd say "hey you must be mixed."

Moto believes there are also some disadvantages of having an Asian name. "I'm getting pigeon holed [as Asian] so occasionally I have bouts of resentment or regret." His name change has created a separation between his public life and his private life. His non-comedy friends still know him as Morgin. Moto ponders "maybe it separates my two different lives and realities--public versus private. The Morgin is low key, the Moto is more outspoken, flamboyant. "

According to Moto, one of the difficulties of expressing a multiracial Asian identity in comedy is the lack of a multiracial identification base.

> It was originally difficult to discuss being mixed. I learned to make it more personal rather than dance around the issue. I put the mixed marriage issue right up front. But it is still difficult. The problem is--neither side wants to claim you. You are whatever other people aren't. The problem is it's difficult to find a group to

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> identify with. I'm a JACL[4] member but I still get some attitude--like "what's the Hapa doing here?"

Moto says if he disagreed with other Asian Americans they would blame it on his "white" side:

> I remember taking Asian American Studies courses at San Francisco State College and getting into arguments with Chinese American students who were sniping at Japanese for being capitalist and for attacking all of Asia. When I would disagree with them they would say "it's the white guy in you talking." Then they would say I was a "banana--white on the inside." I'd like to create a joke about that.

Performing standup in comedy clubs across the country, Moto observes that racial attitudes are very backward once you get outside of cosmopolitan West Coast cities. The prevalence of ethnocentrism and racism prevent many audiences from appreciating multiracial/ethnic identities and perspectives. Moto has had his performances interrupted by people who want to heckle him because

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of his mixed racial heritage. He recalls being interrupted in Idaho by a drunk guy saying something about "mongrels." Moto remembers

> This guy was telling me "I could respect you more if you were full blooded. But you're an aberration of nature." He was interrupting the show so I said "excuse me was there a word there called mongrel?" he said "go on with the show," so I said "oh, how rude of me to interrupt you during my show." I didn't see any point in arguing with him because he was drunk. There's a saying "you can't shine shit." I didn't have the energy to deal with him. So I said "this is America, you're going to believe what you believe. So go home and think about it and be that way if that's what you want to be."

Moto has worked that incident into a joke "this guy once called me a mongrel--I should have humped his leg." Moto recalls seeing some black guy yelling from the back of a club calling him a "slant eyed half-Jap mother-fucking, chicken wing eating son of a bitch. . . " He has worked it into a joke about how he has found out "you don't need to be white to be racist." He says that telling a joke about black

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racists tends to make white audiences more comfortable with his jokes about white racists.

In addition to hecklers, bookers and club owners are often racially abrasive, especially on the East Coast. Moto recalls bookers in Boston who would regularly address him with racial slurs.

> I used to work at a club called Nick's the guy that booked shows used to call me Chink-boy. One night I was supposed to do thirty minutes, so I said give me the light when I have five minutes left. I kept looking out for the light but never saw it flash, finally I got off stage and saw I'd been on for forty-five minutes. I asked the director why he didn't give me the light and he said "I said fuck it, make the chink-boy work for his money tonight." I got things like that alot "hey, Moto you half-Jap bastard!" I got used to it so it didn't bother me after awhile. I figured this was their way of getting to know me. It does say something about someone's perceptions. In the Boston comedy scene if I said I wouldn't be friends with anyone who says the word nigger I wouldn't have many friends. Boston comics have a more in your face attitude.

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Moto believes it has become more difficult to address mixed race perspectives because mainstream comedy audiences have become more conservative.

> The mixed race thing could have worked better a few years ago than now, now people are more reactionary due to increasing racial tension over the past few years. That means you have to step back in terms of racial issues. So I have to be the "Asian" guy, before the "mixed race" thing, or the "mongrel."

As an example of how audiences are becoming more reactionary, Moto recalls

> I was performing for some club in Iowa and hearing some guy say "hey, the white man is a minority today!" I couldn't believe it because I was looking out at a sea of two hundred white faces and I could tell that they all believed it, even though I was the only non-white person there.

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Moto believes it's getting harder, not easier to be mixed race: "it's not time to sit back and say everything is okay, it's time to get organized. What we need is a Hapa militia."

As a standup comedian Moto thinks of himself as an entertainer rather than a performance artist: "As a standup comic I don't think of myself as a platform artist--I don't for one minute think I'm out there changing the world. I'm an entertainer at the bottom line." While he is keeping himself busy as a standup he thinks he could deal with issues of multiraciality more complexly if he did performance art.

> A lot of comics are doing the one-person show to get deeper ideas and not worry about laughs per minute. Sometimes I think I'd like to be a performance art comedian, I'd book myself with some zany title like "Mike Moto's One Man Show: Hopping With the Hapa!"

Beyond Standup

Wishing to avoid various obstacles posed by comedy clubs, a number of comics are pursuing performance art as the most suited venue for the expression of their multi-ethnic/racial Asian

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sensibilities. Performance art allows them to go beyond the demands of mainstream comedy's insistence on lowest common denominator entertainment. They appreciate being able to avoid the racist, homophobic, and sexist environment of the white male[5] oriented comedy scene. Boston comedian Teja Arboleda explains that the mindset of the comedy club scene is not receptive to the expression of multi-ethnic/racial issues:

> Boston is not receptive to my views at a mike. The difficulties in expressing multi-ethnic or racial enigmas are expected in a city like Boston, as the city is segregated and racially intolerant . . . the history of segregation in Boston dictates the intolerance to not just culturally liberal thinking but clears the path for direct confrontation from a mostly white uncultured and narrow--minded public. Beer, sex and gay bashing were pretty much the topics of every evening to late night mental trashing at Boston comedy clubs.

Performance art audiences come to see the performance rather than to be merely entertained, socialize, or get drunk. Los Angeles performance artist Amy Hill says "as a comedian I prefer

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performance art because people are not there to see you bash and because I have their full attention which is necessary for complex ideas" Los Angeles performance artist Kip Fulbeck doesn't like having to conform his style and material to meet comedy club audiences' expectations for "penis jokes and Eddy Murphy style humor." Another advantage in performance art it is acceptable to be serious as well as comic. Los Angeles performance artist Amy Hill says

> doing standup I felt restricted because I was compelled to always laugh and some of my material is not just for laughs. Comedy venue audiences are not deep thinkers, so complex humor that is painful or biting doesn't work well. In my performances people are coming to see me so I can take the time to focus on my own life, stories, and character development.

As multiracial Asian performance artists they are hired to perform primarily for Asian American and ethnically mixed audiences at schools and community sponsored shows.

Kip Fulbeck aggressively asserts his personal perspectives on hapa identity through standup style commentary he expresses in

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short skits. After announcing in the beginning of his show "Some Questions for 28 Kisses" that he is a hapa of Chinese and English, Irish, and Welsh descent Kip says

> I'm not gonna explain what hapa means. I'm not going to talk about checking ethnicity boxes. And I'm not gonna talk about being the model minority's own personal model minority. So don't even start with giving me the "best of both worlds, hybrid vigor, exotic, desirable" bullshit--'cause I can bring you out some butt-ass ugly hapas right now, alright? Seen it. Done it. Lived it. Next?

This peice addresses Fulbeck's observation of how hapa identity has been exotified and otherwise misconstrued in popular perceptions.

While Asian Americans are more aware of hapa identity issues than mainstream audiences there are still many mono-racially-ethnically identified Asian Americans who don't see hapas as Asian American. Fulbeck confronts Asian Americans who don't think hapas are Asian American.

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> If you're an APA (Asian Pacific American) who thinks hapas aren't really Asian Americans we got a problem . . . in too many eyes and minds an Asian American artist is one of pure Asian blood. We come in bright-eyed and hopeful to a place that could be home and find we have to change our names or adopt Asian ones to pass on paper. We Asianize our surnames as badges of our part-blood (see . . . look closely at my eyes) or become members of the horrendously snowballing three-name-club . . . .

According to Fulbeck, "all my work is about being mixed blood. I am a hapa first, an Asian American artist second." However, many people are not used to thinking about multi-racial perspectives. Some Asian Americans have a hard time appreciating issues of mixed race. Fulbeck says "the subject matter is not discussed with asians very much" and believes he experiences "the reverse racism for not being Asian enough." He believes

> the subtle but really critical differences from what I'm doing vs. what a full asian is doing are sometimes

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> missed. i.e., if I'm doing a segment about "what are you?" audiences can identify with the "all orientals look the same" "rice chaser stuff" but the subtleties of the hapa issues are often overlooked.

Fulbeck says some black audiences don't respond well to jokes about multiracial identity because for them its not a new issue. "more sophisticated (racial and ethnic aware" audiences sometimes find the subject matter a non-issue. Particularly some black audiences who have dealt with mixed blood since the first rape of the first slave."

Kip Fulbeck says that his work is highly provocative to a wide range of peoples. Afterwards people often come up and accuse him of being racist, heterosexual or sexist, and want to know why he doesn't address whatever issues they are affiliated with. "You name it and they've come after me--mostly white men or Asian women, occasionally Asian men, occasionally pro sovereignty Hawaiians for using hapa, feminists, gays, basically any oppressed group." Fulbeck says

> making fun of parents and relatives can be taken offensively mostly due to crap like Margaret Cho who just bags to get a laugh. When I'm doing my mother or

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> uncle I'm doing it out of love and I'm doing it out of respect and reverence for the way they talk--I love their versions of English. But if you've seen a zillion white comedians trash orientals for speaking funny English it's easy to assume that I'm being derogatory.

In "Talking Shop" Fulbeck emphasizes the personal irony he experiences as a hapa male. After he points out to a friend who doesn't date Asian men and never really thought about it that they were on a date, she tells him, "Kip, you're not like an asian man." Then an Asian male friend tells him to make a film denouncing interracial dating. Fulbeck responds "if it weren't for a white man dating an Asian woman, I wouldn't be here." His friend says "but Kip, you're like an Asian man." Kip explains that when it comes to the issue of Asian women dating out that both Asian American women and men thought he must be on their side"

> The men thought "well, you're an Asian man, you know what it's like with all these sisters dating white guys," and the women said "the men are so sexist, you're Hapa, you're a product of this." Then I'd get the Joy Luck couples coming up to me after performances and actually

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saying "we want to get a closer look so we can see what our kids will look like."[6]

The issue of Asian female/Caucasian male dating is highly controversial. Observing heated reactions to Fulbeck's skits on interracial dating, journalist Tim Ryan observes "whenever the issue of Asian women dating `out' was brought up, the discussion deteriorated into `a big gender war'".[7] The most hostile reactions have come from Caucasian males who don't like his "I Love Oriental Women" skit in which he takes on the personal of a "rice chasing white guy" who is always trying to get dates with Asian women and even looks up women with Asian last names on college admission lists to welcome them. He has been physically confronted as well as verbally assaulted by white men who take this skit personally. Fulbeck says he now avoids after-performance questions because his material "really gets people pissed . . . too often people want to kill the messenger and I'm getting tired of being asked to fight." Such heated audience reactions are testimony to the necessity to continue addressing issues of hapa identity.

Amy Hill's autobiographical narrative "Beside Myself" examines how the dominant society's attitudes influenced her identity development as a woman of multiracial/ethnic Asian descent. After

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discussing traits of her Finnish father and Japanese mother, Hill introduces her preference for hapa identity by joking "I'm a happy hapa. Hapa-haole--that's Hawaiian. Better than half breed, mongrel, or moral aberration." Hill explains how she felt good about herself as a child but began to feel bad about herself because of society. "People see me walking down the sidewalk with my European friend and her daughter and assume I'm the nanny or the housekeeper. I don't know where people think I'm from but it sure ain't here!" In addition to being treated as second class for being non-white, Hill observes how it would be easier if people could tell what she was right away:

> People speak to me in Spanish all the time. I remember this woman who came up to me and started speaking in Spanish. I said "I'm sorry I don't speak Spanish." She thought I was lying--she said "You're ashamed, you're Latina, be proud!" . . . it would be great if people could tell that I was Japanese and Finnish right off the bat. But then I'd be pulling a reindeer and pulling a Dauschund dog.

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In Hill's narrative she emphasizes that there are many variables besides being of mixed descent that greatly influence people of mixed descent's lives:

> I've got friends that are half Japanese and half African American that are dark. Half Chinese and half Puerto Rican that are overweight. Or half Filipino and half Mexican and shave their head and really rich and powerful with a bad complexion. When they walk through the world I wonder what they feel, what voices they hear?

Hill explains how she wants to stop the stereotypes and prejudices that she has internalized that caused her to feel negatively about herself. Hill finishes her autobiographical work on an uplifting comic note:

> For me the voices never stop. "Speak English!" Like when I see someone is mixed race and I think "what the heck is that?" . . . I want to find my way back, walk back into that room and find like my mother did, find I am creating the voices, and I can make them stop until I can

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sing my song--"Amy, Amy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier!"

Offstage Hill discusses how it took her a long time before she felt comfortable enough to express her multiracial Asian heritage.

> Growing up in Seattle I didn't think Asian American included mixed race. I always like the word Hapa--it's cute sounds happy. Amerasian sounds sterile, no guts. I loved Eurasian. It sounded exotic, sexy to me. But no one told me I was exotic or sexy when I was growing up. Being multiracial, I always felt I was unacceptable. I grew up trying to please people. I didn't have a sense of who I was. It took awhile to say what I feel and what I am. It wasn't until my thirties that I felt like I had permission to talk about these things in a personal way. My whole life is about not fitting in. Not being white, not being Japanese.

Hill says that although people think her material is funny, she is not always trying to make people laugh. Her stories help her to express herself and to make sense of her life experiences. According to Hill

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"the important thing is that people don't see my show and think, oh, what a sad life you have." Hill believes hapa identity is still an important issue to examine because "groups are still so polarized". She notes that interracial identities and issues are primarily addressed in the media in terms of people of African American and Euro-American descent.

As a Boston performer Teja Arboleda is acutely aware of the need to bring discussions of multi-ethnicity/raciality beyond black and white issues. Teja Arboleda demystifies multi-raciality/ethnicity in his autobiographical performance "The Adventures of Ethnic Man". He begins the show by announcing his own multi-ethnic/racial heritage: "My mother's mother is German, my mother's father is Danish. My father's mother is African/Native American, my father's father is Filipino/Chinese. I was born in Brooklyn and grew up in Japan, and that's why they call me Ethnic Man!"

Arboleda then proceeds to provide numerous examples of how people's limited awareness of and denial of multi-ethnicity/raciality prevent them from seeing him for who he really is. He explains that because his father censored the fact that their family has African ancestry he did not realize he was partially African American until he was in his twenties. He discusses how it was confusing growing

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up with phenotypically ambiguous appearances when he attends a predominantly black school in Brooklyn where he is expected to identify whether he is black or white. Arboleda then draws from his experiences of living in Japan to examine issues of multi-ethnicity/raciality from an international perspective. Arboleda expresses Japanese perceptions of his identity through jokes such as the following one in which he is told he looks like Michael Jackson as an intended but unwelcome compliment:

> The Japanese school girls in their uniforms, they thought I was American. They would crowd around me on the train, crowd around me and pat my head and say "Hey, are you an American? You're an American right?" "No I'm an Arab and I flew here on a magic carpet. Yes, I'm an American." "Oh, you're so cute, you're so cute. You're an American--you look like Michael Jackson!" Michael Jackson? If I went back now, they'd probably still think I look like Michael Jackson. I'd have to say "Michael Jackson doesn't even look like Michael Jackson!!!"

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Arboleda does not think it is a complement to be told he looks like Michael Jackson because he thinks Jackson provides a prime example of the type of ethnic/racial denial that he is trying to overcome. Arboleda says half of the motivation for his work is his attempt to reveal "the power, and sometimes necessity, and pain, that comes from family secrecy." Discussing the detrimental effects this secrecy has had on his family, Arboleda says

> My father is still living in this secrecy. It's to the point that one of my relatives has threatened to commit suicide because he can't deal with the secrecy. I think that secrecy exists in everyone's background in all families whether they think of themselves as mixed or not. It's always been a part of why people move far away, or stop communicating with relatives. Sometimes it's not secrecy so much, sometimes it's just plain outright denial . . . Performance art is like undressing in public--there are no more secrets.

While Arboleda has always had to perform mono-racial/ethnic characters as an actor in the United States as well as Japan, he has always expressed his full multi-ethnicity as a standup as well as

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performance art comedian. "I never once thought it better to present myself as one ethnicity as a comedian. That would go against everything I'm doing. " In addition to breaking cycles of ethnic denial, one of his goals of his performance is to break down ethnocentric thinking that continues to keep groups separated. He finishes his show with the assertion: "we all want the same thing. We all want to preserve our heritages and our cultures--but we can't continue to isolate ourselves."

By expressing their multi-ethnic/racial heritages through humor these comedians help to make audible voices that have been historically denied in American comedy. Their experiences as comedians reveal the importance of performance as a forum that is conducive for expressing the complexities of multiracial Asian identities and perspectives.

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Endnotes

[1] Velina Hasu Houston "To the Colonizer Goes the Spoils: Amerasian Progeny in Vietnam War Films and Owning Up to the Gaze" Amerasia Journal 23:1 (1997):69-86.

[3] The issue of inclusiveness is faced by many other ethnic-based student groups at the Univerity of California since they are supposed to be open to students based on personal interest regardless of heritage, but memberships tend to be most represented by students of the ethnicity which are the primary focus of the organization(s). Neo-conservatives such as UC Regent Ward Connerly have attempted to ban all organizations basing membership and/or focus on race or ethnicity including Ethnic Studies, ethnic graduations, ethnic libraries, and ethnic student groups. Connerly's concern centers on non-Euro-American ethnic organizations rather than European or Euro-American organizations.

[4]Japanese American Citizen's League.

[5] Hill says "it's a man's world still. All accross the board it's men that are running everything. If it's an evening of women it's `Women's Comedy Night' but not the other way around."

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[6]George Johnston "Shame on Those Ashamed of Martial Arts," *Rafu* Dec. 21, 1994.

[7]Tim Ryan, "Hapa-haole Filmaker Wants to Provoke You," *Star Bulletin* Oct, 29, 1994. B-5.

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Chapter Seven
FILIPINO AMERICAN MESTIJAZE COMEDY

> Filipinos come from seven hundred islands and seven thousand dialects before they arrive in the U.S. and because of their long history of colonization and interracial mixing, there is a wide range of looks--some look Chinese, some look Filipino, some look Spanish, some look African, others look Italian.--- Ron Muriera, comedian

Although categorized as Asian, Filipino identity is different than other Asian groups due to the long history of colonization, interracial mixing, postcolonial migration, and greater invisibility in American culture.[1] This chapter critically analyzes the mediation of ethnic identities among Filipino American comedians. My discussion builds upon concepts set forth by Leny Mendoza Strobel's observation in "The Cultural Identity of Third-Wave Filipino Americans" of how Filipino Americans have responded to colonization through processes of cultural identity formation characterized by stages of conformity, dissonance, resistance and immersion, introspection, and selective or multicultural integration.[2] I begin with a discussion of the U.S. social context for the emergence of identities among Filipino American comedians.

Asian Americans in general are hindered by the historical and

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still prevalent belief that Asians do not have a sense of humor.[3] The perception that Asians do not have a sense of humor is one aspect of the conception of Asian Americans as "perpetual foreigners"[4] as well as their historical marginalization in mainstream entertainment."[5] Until recently Asian American comedians have remained nearly invisible in the comedy industry.[6] Reflecting the current upswing in the political and economic relations between the U.S. and Asian countries as we enter the century of the Pacific Rim, a few Asian Americans have recently gained some access to mainstream media as comedians. "All American Girl" (1994-95) was the first television sitcom to feature an Asian American family.[7] However, none of the prominent Asian American comedians--Margaret Cho, Henry Cho, Tamayo Otsuki, Phil Nee, Pat Morita--have been Filipino Americans. Many for comic success, due to the historical American colonization and forced acculturation in the Philippines, Filipino Americans would be expected to have a higher ratio of comedians than other Asian American groups. However, the reverse appears to have occurred: Americanization of Filipinos has resulted in a general lack of Filipino identity in popular entertainment because they are not considered culturally "Asian" enough. Darrell Hamamoto writes in Monitored Peril: Asian Americans and the Politics of T.V. Representation the relative scarcity of Filipino Americans in television entertainment compared to other Asian American groups can be attributed to "their colonial pre-adaptation to American society and culture, Christian and European heritage, Spanish surnames, and competence in the English language."[9] Comedian Al Manalo believes that Filipino identity is more of a disadvantage in comedy than other Asian

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identities because Filipinos don't fit into the dominant perception of what Asians are. According to Manalo, one of the problems is that "most people don't know what Filipinos are--it's always been a question if Filipinos are Asian American. I don't have that Asian look."[10]

Despite high levels of acculturation, Filipino Americans remain politically and economically marginalized to a greater extent than other Asian American groups. Jonathan Y. Okamura writes "despite the long history of immigration and settlement of Filipinos in the United States, which dates back to the late eighteenth century, and their emergence as the second largest Asian American group, they remain a marginalized population at the political and economic edges of American society."[11]

The lack of knowledge about Filipino Americans in the U.S. hinders the ability of mainstream audiences and the comedy industry to appreciate Filipino American comedy. Mohadev Apte writes in Humor Around the World: An Anthropological Approach (1985) that one of the factors necessary for the institutional development of humor is "shared cultural knowledge." (261)[12] According to comedian Ron Muriera, "when most people see Filipino American comedians, there isn't a basis for a laughter of recognition. Not like when they see Jewish or African American comedians." On the flip side, dissonance arising from such invisibility can serve as a premise in Filipino American humor. Addressing the lack of Filipinos in movies and television, comedian Rex Navarette jokes "I'd like to see more Filipinos in movies. You never see Filipinos on Star Trek. You hear them though--everytime when that door goes

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psssssst.psssssst."[13]

Dissonance

Dissonance among Filipino Americans arises from a social context where Filipino identity is for the most part invisible, uncertain, and misunderstood.[14] Although categorized as Asian, "virtually all" Filipinos are racially mixed. (Root 1992; Cordova 1973).[15] Due to the legacy of colonization and interracial mixing, Filipino identity is more ambiguous than other Asian identities.

Ron Muriera is respectfully referred to as the "Manong of Comedy" among Filipino American comedians because he has been performing comedy regularly since the 1970s. A character comedian, Muriera learned his performance skills by doing comedy and improvisation with the Asian American Theater company of San Francisco. Due to the racial ambiguity Muriera has experienced he has presented himself during his career as a comedian as a series of sixteen different characters. Muriera explains "I went through a limbo state, I would continually change my character. That was from not being comfortable with being a Filipino American. And from other people not knowing what a Filipino was. And me not quite sure what a Filipino was."

Muriera's most popular comedy character is Enrico Rosales, a half Italian and half Filipino accordion playing ladies' man. Having created a whole history as well as persona for this character, Muriera explains "Enrico Rosales is like a clown who entertains and makes people laugh, but in the end he goes home alone and bitter." Not able to distinguish his stage persona from his true self, people who have

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seen his performance sometimes think he really is Enrico Rosales. Muriera has written a situation comedy script centered around Enrico Rosales and a Filipino American family. However, he does not believe that mainstream television is very interested in a Filipino American sitcom.

Filipino American comedians commonly joke about the dissonance of being mistaken as Chicano or some other non-Filipino ethnic identity. I was up in Eureka and people had no clue, they were like, "What's the busboy doing on stage?" They don't even know what Filipino means. "Filipino? Sounds like some kind of Mexican pepper, had one in my taco the other day." Manalo found that while touring throughout the country that while some recognized him as Asian they usually didn't differentiate Filipino from other Asian groups. Manalo jokes "I'm Filipino American, which in the Midwest means I'm Chinese."[16] Sometimes even Chicanos cannot distinguish between people of Mexican descent and Filipino descent. Andy Bumatai, who grew up in California and Hawaii of Filipino, Hawaiian, French, and German descent, jokes about being mistaken for Chicano while in California: "In Santa Monica this older Mexican looking guy comes up to me and says `Hola amigo, de donde es el Rojo Saloon?' I said `sorry, I don't speak Spanish' and he said `that's the problem with today's generation, you don't even know your own language."[17]

Believing himself to look Mexican, Muriera says "Filipinos and Mexicans have alot in common--same conquistadors, the names match up." He notes that even other Filipinos are sometimes confused by Filipino identitiy. Muriera recalls a film shoot where a Filipina questioned his identity: "when I told her I was Filipino, she

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said `what kind of Filipino?' I said `my mother's Vasayan, my Dad's from Manila, and I grew up in New Jersey--you figure it out."[18]

Manalo observes that the lack of knowledge about Filipino Americans among general audiences serves as a barrier: "I wind up having to explain alot of stuff and have to resort to simpler jokes because most mainstream audiences just don't get alot of my [Filipino American] material." Because of the lack of general knowledge about Filipino Americans, most Filipino American comedians feel pressures to mainstream their material for greater marketibility.

Conformity

Catering to mainstream interests among ethnic comedians is often accompanied by disassociation from and denigration of one's own ethnic group(s) to create a sense of "we-ness" with general audiences. Comedians marketing themselves for mainstream audiences often wish to be referred to as "comedians" rather than in an ethnic specific way. A number of comedians of Filipino descent describe themselves as comedians who happen to be Filipino.

When I first explained to comedian Tessie Chua that I was doing research on ethnic comedians she responded "I'm not an ethnic comedian, why do I have to be categorized in that ethnic way? I'm just a comedian." She later explained "we need to see ourselves as a global nationality, one race." Chua began her performance career as a performance actress in New York City. She has been featured in wild costumes from giant cockroach outfits to full fledged nuns. Becoming a comedian after moving to San Francisco, she says her main criteria for her humor is "that it is funny, that people laugh."[19] Chua believes

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that being categorized as Filipino is limiting in a market that is dominated by mainstream white audiences and club managers. Discussing how mainstream audiences pose constraints on how much ethnic specific material you can successfully use, Muriera says "Tessie is closer to my generation, for us to make it in the mainstream, ethnic specific ain't gonna make it. You can sprinkle it in, but most of it will go over mainstream audiences' heads."

While Chua does not want to be categorized in an ethnic way, she does take advantage of her Filipino ancestry through jokes that would be less acceptable for non-Filipinos to use. For example Chua jokes "In addition to being Chinese, I'm Filipino and Irish, this means I eat dog, but only if I can wash it down with Guinness Stout."[20]

Comedian Clarence Sterling similarly incorporates his heritage into a joke that plays upon dominant stereotypes. The following joke incorporates stereotypes of Filipinos as dogeaters and Samoans as fighters: "My mother's a Filipino, my father he's wide--he looks like a small Samoan. I'm so confused, I don't know whether to eat my dog or beat the hell out of it. But I'm smart, I walk my girlfriend's dog and beat the hell out of her." Reinforcing the image of Filipinos as dogeaters Sterling jokes "Do we have any mailmen out there? Most mailmen use mace. Filipino mailmen use hibachis. Those bags they carry? There's no mail in there, just dogs." Playing upon the image of Filipinos as short, Sterling jokes "the first Filipino football player, his height was only four feet eleven inches and weight ninety-eight pounds--he was always running back." Ridiculing himself because of his short height as a Filipino, Sterling jokes "I had to be a short Filipino in America. The urinal was this high [gestures above waist],

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what was I supposed to do, aim? [stands on toes and motions] hang it over? [motioning] So this is what I did [jumping up] and if I jumped real high [jumping high] I'd get it in." On the issue of whether his material is offensive, Sterling says "I'm just a comedian and I'm here to make people laugh. That's what comedy is all about."[21]

Considering himself to be "a comedian who happens to be Filipino"[22] Kennedy Kabasares says he doesn't feel it is necessary for him to do material specific to Filipino identity. Kabasares grew up in San Francisco then became a theater major at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. When I asked him why he doesn't do much material specific to being Filipino American, Kabasares responded "I'm not politically charged, I'm more an entertainer, an Asian American in general, or an actor. I don't think it's important or necessary to discuss being Filipino in my comedy. I mention it, but its not a heavy part." His material is oriented for a general audience. For example, he jokes: "I went back to the Philippines. This guy asks `Ken, do you like to pish?' I said what? He said, `yeah, you can pish from the boat, pish on the beach, pish on the river.' See, every word with a `p' means an `f', so I went to my room and started pucking."[23] Such dialect humor relies on creating intellectual incongruity rather than causing people to think about social or political issues. Moreover, by making fun of Filipino accents, this style of humor caters to the dominant stereotype that Asians can't speak proper English.

Comedians catering to mainstream values and interests often reinforce rather than subvert stereotypes. The next section examines comedy intended to challenge dominant misconceptions.

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Resistance

Whereas some comedians consider their main goal as "to be funny", some comedians make a direct point of using humor as a tool to challenge stereotypical thinking and other ethnic misconceptions. Such resistance involves constructing jokes that serve as social commentary or satire. Filipino American comedians who use humor as resistance often make fun of people who believe the stereotypes.

Although Chua doesn't specifically address Filipino identity or issues, she has jokes that reflect her perspectives as a woman who does not conform to the popular image of Asian women:

> You know those personal ads that say `submissive Asian woman, expert masseuse?' I put those in there. Then these guys come over, and I tell them to go lay on the bed while I change. Then I go in the next room, put on my golf shoes, then run back in and jump on their backs! That way they get acupuncture and massage at the same time!

The comic impact of jokes such as this one are enhanced by Chua's large size and her in your face New York attitude. Chua says she is surprised when people tell her they like her "persona"--"that's not a persona up there, that's me. I'm a loud, angry person and it comes out when I'm on stage."

Manalo turns the belief that Filipinos are dogeaters into a form of resistance by making people who believe the stereotype the target

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of the joke:

> People will try to bond by saying they like Filipino food, then in the same breath they'll say "Oh, so you eat dog don't you? heh, heh." But the stereotype has advantages--just to have fun we'd go to a pet shop and stare at the cages and then ask for a pound of Benji.

Considering himself to be a "political" comedian, much of his material directly confronts dominant perspectives towards Filipinos. Manalo jokes about how ignorant people often unknowingly reveal their racist attitudes when they talk about how they like Filipino food or Filipinos. Manalo jokes:

> This older white guy tries to impress me by saying `I love Filipinos. I was an officer in World War II stationed at Subeck Bay. I loved those comfort girls.' That really upset me. I mean, this guy was trying to impress me by saying he liked the prostitutes in Subeck Bay! So I got him back--I said `Dad! where have you been? Mom's been looking for you! Where's the alimony checks? Hey, where are you going? I've got your eyes.[24]

Reflecting a perspective critical of the U.S. colonization of the Phillipines, this joke gives a Filipino American perspective on the relationship of U.S. military personnel to prostitution and orphans in the Phillipines.[25]

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While Asian American audiences express strong appreciation for humor that challenges dominant attitudes towards Filipino and other Asian American groups, such jokes pose certain disadvantages in a context where the majority of the population has little understanding of Filipino American perspectives. Apte explains that acceptance of humor relies on "shared rules of interpretation" and "agreement on the cultural appropriateness" (262). Failure to empathize with minority perspectives sometimes causes Euro-American audience members to react negativly to jokes that reflect Filipino American perspectives. Sometimes audience members confront comedians who they feel are being racist or culturally insensitive.

Manalo was confronted after his performance at an Asian American Jazz Festival by a Euro-American man who accused him of "bashing whites".. Manalo discusses the irony of a Caucasian man going to an Asian American cultural event and then complaining about cultural sensitivity. According to Manalo, "his coming up to accuse me of being culturally insensitive during an Asian American cultural event was not only culturally insensitive on his part, but reflects his cultural arrogance that as a white guy he can criticize Asian Americans wherever and whenever he feels like it. I bet he wouldn't have done that if it were a black cultural event."

Turning negative reactions to his material into a premise for humor, Manalo has followed up political material during other performances with "I see some of you out there going `Hey, I thought this was a comedy show. This looks like a militant Filipino--I want my money back!"

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While some comedians of Filipino descent attempt to downplay their Filipino heritages, others regard their ethnic identities and outlooks to be central to their comedy. Manalo says "some peoples' mentality of getting rid of color lines is to forget their heritage altogether and adopt the American identity. While I consider myself an American, I believe your ethnic heritage is important. The whole Melting Pot idea is a myth--we are a salad bowl of different ethnicities. If you don't know who you are, you will forever drift in identity limbo."

Navarette says establishing himself in his Filipino American community is more important than playing to mainstream audiences. Navarette explains "I know Filipino comedians who play to the mainstream, then they come to the Filipino community and people don't know who they are. I don't want to follow that path . . . I'd like to live in and need to understand what's going on in my community first." For Navarette, it is important to address issues relevant to the experiences of Filipinos and other Asians in America: "I'd like to talk about the stuff we see being Asian and Filipino, still being treated as minorities, as second class."

Asserting their Filipino identities as integral aspects of their comedy, both Manalo and Navarette have business cards with their ethnic identity printed under their names. Manalo's says "young urban Pilipino comedian," and Navarette's says "S.F. Bay Area `Pinoy' Comic". They were both inspired to use comedy to educate people and to affirm their Filipino heritages after taking Asian American Studies courses at San Francisco State, which is reflected in their personal outlooks as well as comedy.

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Introspection

Beyond resistance to dominant paradigms, some Filipino American comedians draw materials from processes of introspection that lead them to analyze their ethnic identities on individual, group, and historical levels. Some of the comedians discuss how the dominant culture's marginalization of Filipino American identity caused them to go through periods of denial.

Manalo explains that "growing up as a Filipino American, there was a feeling of non-existence. Filipinos were not mentioned in high school `American' history books." Manalo recalls how he found a creative solution to a high school teacher's request that he write about Filipinos in America: "I didn't find anything in the library on Filipinos, so I made stuff up about a heroic Filipino American named Rosale and got an A." Manalo explains that because of the lack of representation of Filipino American identity "it wasn't until I took Asian American Studies courses that I was proud to affirm a Filipino identity. In Asian American Studies I found out my father was part of American history as a Filipino agricultural worker. He was one of those guys we read about."

Manalo reflects upon his personal experiences of not being accepted as an American by whites because of his brown skin, and not accepted as Filipino by Filipinos because he couldn't speak Tagalog. Manalo turned to other ethnic groups, first black, then Chicano for his identity: "there was a point where I didn't want to be Filipino. Because one of my family names was `Bamba' I actually convinced myself that I was Mexican." Incorporating these

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experiences into his comedy, the following joke routine is based on Manalo's personal introspection of identity stages that he went through before accepting his Filipino heritage:

> I'm very proud of my Filipino heritage now, but it's funny you know, growing up Filipino American is different, we go through a lot of shit too you know. You've got Filipinos telling us you're not Filipino enough and you have Americans telling you hey you're not American, right? So you're caught between the two--you don't know what the fuck you are.
>
> I swear, when I was growing up I wanted to be black because I didn't want to deal with it. I wanted to be African American. My mom would call me from the kitchen and say "hey Al, come here" and I would say [black accent] "no mom, my name is Donnel." I used to walk around the kitchen holding my crotch thinking it was a black thing, saying "hey, what's up Grandpa?" Then finally these black guys said "Hey, Donnel, or whatever your name is, you can hang out with us but why don't you get rid of that perm?"
>
> Then in my high school I thought I was La Raza and I was trying to cling onto some kind of Chicano identity. I used to lowride--but all the Chicanos knew I was Filipino because I lowrided a Toyota.
>
> It's important to know who you are, to be grounded. I'm Third Space Filipino American--not

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> Filipino, not fully American, but somewhere inbetween and that's OK.

Manalo also jokes about how other Filipino Americans attempt to pass as a strategy of adaptation to a society where Filipinos are granted low status. He discusses his cousin who started wearing blue contact lenses and changed his name to `Blue Velveeta'. Commenting on how many Filipino Americans seem ashamed to assert their heritage in public, Manalo jokes about his encounters with Filipinos in the Midwest: "There aren't many Filipinos in the Midwest, so when I see one I go up and say, `hey, it's so good to see another Filipino.' They say `shhhhhhhh. Don't talk so loud--we don't want people to know that we're Filipino.'"

Sharing similar views towards Filipinos who wish to hide their Filipino identities, Navarette jokes

> I think we should be proud of what we look like. But doesn't it freak you out when you see an Asian sister with blond hair? And blue contact lenses? And peroxide white skin that looks like some kind of skin disease? Or how about an Asian guy with a perm? That just makes you look like Ronald McDonald!

Having grown up in an urban Filipino American community in San Francisco, Navarette sees East Coast Filipinos as trying hard to assimilate. Recalling his performance at the University of Pennsylvania, Navarette says, "what a tight school. Filipinos were

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really tight butt there, dressed really conservatively, wearing ties. There are only certain things you can talk about there. There, they're more of a minority." Recalling how he joked to the audience "Filipinos are so tight but here that I bet they fart in installments."

Manalo observes how many Filipinos fully believe in the American Dream to the degree that they fully overlook discrimination and an unequal status quo.[26] The following joke is about Filipino immigrants who brag about the social status they had while in the Philipines rather than acknowledging their lower socio-economic status and difficulty in finding good jobs in the United States.

> There are a lot of professionals that come over thinking that America is this place that says welcome. So they strive for recognition of their achievements because when they come over here it doesn't mean anything. So this older Filipino is trying to impress me saying `I was a doctor, I had a very extensive practice, I was. I was a PIP.' So I said `That's really nice, but can I have my whopper now?

Manalo emphasizes how many Filipinos have difficulty in admitting that their opportunities are limited in the U.S.. Responding to Filipinos who are offended by his comments Manalo says, `I'm not dissin' my peoples' now, but they just don't have opportunities. People are going `hey, that's wrong.' But it's true, man! And you have to wake up to the truth."

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More interested in expressing their perspectives as Filipino Americans than appeasing mainstream audiences, Manalo and Navarette have developed a number of comedy sketches that reflect Filipino American historical experiences and cultural sensibilities. The following excerpt from a sketch titled "Taxi Dance" they performed for an Asian American Jazz festival.[27] As the emcee for the nights entertaiment, Manalo has warmed up the audience with comic commentary and a number of his jokes. As the lights fade in, Navarette and Manalo are seen on stage in zoot suits grooming and preparing for a nineteen-thirties Taxi Dance. Accompanied by an Asian American jazz pianist, both men sway to the music during the following conversation:

> Manalo: To understand this piece, go back to the thirties. Filipinos coming for fame and fortune, found asparagus fields and hard work. And taxi dance halls to release their frustration.
>
> Navarette [dancing]: Dancing.
>
> Manalo [trying to dance]: I never learned. [audience laughter]
>
> Navarette: That's OK, You're Filipino. [laughter]
>
> Manalo: I'm Methodist. [laughter] You teach me.
>
> Rex [dancing]: Dancing is an art, that makes me an artist! [laughter] The important thing is not to listen to the music, but feel the music. I have a theory: Pinoy's invented jazz!
>
> Manalo [puzzled look]: What? [laughter]

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> Navarette: Yeah, see a long time ago, the Spaniards brought Filipinos to New Orleans. Filipinos jumped ship. All Pinoys like music. So that's where I get my theory! [laughter] Jazz to me is from the soul--beautiful on the inside, like my first day in this country. But it ended. What do I have now? Sore back. These were hard days. It was jazz that kept me afloat. It's my music, your music, our music!

Perhaps this type of ethnic specific comedy would go over the heads of mainstream audiences. However, this sketch provides an example of how Filipino comedy can be used to affirm and educate people about Filipino identity and historical experience to a greater degree than the typical simple jokes based on dialects or eating dogs. Superficial jokes that cater to mainstream perspectives tend to reinforce rather than subvert stereotypes. While the more insightful and sophisticated ethnic comedy is not yet promoted by the mainstream comedy clubs or television, such humor makes an invaluable contribution to society by disseminating and affirming Filipino American heritage.

Multiculturalism

Reflecting a multicultural consciousness that extends beyond Filipino American and Asian American concerns, Many Filipino American comedians employ jokes that address issues and concerns relevant to the experiences of other marginalized groups. For example, Navarette acknowledges the exclusion and cultural

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appropriation of people of Mexican descent by the dominant society in jokes such as: "Chevy's has all that authentic Mexican food. But what I don't like about Chevy's is they don't have any authentic Mexicans there." Addressing the connection between ethnocentrism and a lack of multiculturalism in the dominant education system, Manalo jokes

> This guy came up and stopped me and asked "Do you speakee English?" I thought, maybe I don't because I've never heard the word speakee! Then I thought where did this guy learn to speak English? School of the Ignorant Hick? [mimicking] "Hello, my name is Professor Dumb Butt and today's lesson is on Orientals and the letter `e'. To speak with Orientals just add an `e' to everything. Tomorrow's lesson will be on Latinos and the letter `o'." "Do you speakee English?" "Yeah, fuckee youee!!!!!"

To promote ethnic diversity in comedy Manalo has organized numerous multicultural and Asian American comedy events in the Bay Area. Manalo conceived of and organized the "Color of Funny: Multicultural Comedy Competition" sponsored by Oakland's Ohanna Cultural Center. Beginning in 1991, the annual competition was the first in the nation to judge comedians on the basis of their ability to subvert stereotypes and impart cultural information.[28] To increase opportunities for Asian American comedians, Manalo has organized a number of Asian American comedy events such as the "Comics From A Different Shore: An Evening of Asian American Comedy" held at

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the University of California at Berkeley in 1993, and the four-night Asian American comedy festival titled "Wat's Dat in my Rice?" held at the Holy City Zoo Comedy Club in 1993. Some of Manalo's Asian American comedy events have been organized as benefits for Filipino American or other Asian American community groups.

Manalo became the first full-time professional Filipino American standup comedian in the country in 1993 as he embarked on an extensive national college comedy tour spanning forty seven states and three years. In 1992 Manalo, Kennedy Kabasares, Ron Muriera, and Rex Navarette established "Tongue in a Mood Theater" for the purpose of infiltrating the many commercialized Filipino Fiestas with satirical sketch comedy and to form a writing group for a television project. In 1996 Patty Cachapero and Kevin Camia replaced Ron Muriera and Rex Navarette. In 1996 Manalo established Coco Jam Productions specializing in Asian American and Filipino American shows for colleges. Tongue in a Mood's production "Tsis Mis" featuring thirteen comedy sketches addressing issues of identity, history, and culture was showcased in 1997.[29] "Tsis Mis" features experiences of Filipinos in both the Phillipines and the United States, as exemplified in the following discussion between an immigrant grandfather and his American-born grandchildren.

> Sue: You must have been very rich Lolo.
> Lolo: No, no, no. We worked very hard for little money. Like the warriors in the mountains of the Philippines.
> Jimmy: I didn't know we had warriors in the Philippines. I thought we was Spanish.

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Lolo: No, the Spanish colonized and conquered us for hundreds of years. That's why you see similarities in our cultures.

Sue: Similarities in our cultures, really?

[sound of Spanish music, they all dance]

Heather: Wow grandpa, that's amazing!

Jimmy: Why do you always call him "grandpa"? Are you ashamed of our language?

Heather: I don't speak Taglog.

Lolo: That's "Tagalog" Acopo.

Heather: Acopo? But my name is Heather.

Lolo: "Acopo" means "my grandchild". Your language is part of your heritage. You should learn your language. Show some pride in your heritage.

Heather: But I don't even know what my heritage is![30]

A Filipino warrior/Professor "Rosales" visits Heather in a dream sequence to give her a Filipino American history lesson. In awe at his handsome appearance Heather asks "have you seen `Friends?'" [the popular all-white sitcom] Warrior/Professor Rosales responds "you don't have to be white to be an American, you can be a Filipino American." Afterwards Heather surprises her relatives by returning with a Filipino American history book and using Tagalog, symbolizing her newly found Filipino American identity.

Although the mainstream comedy industry has done little to facilitate Filipino American comedy, a growing number of Filipino American comedians are featuring perspectives they have gained

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from living in those spaces on the socio-cultural periphery of Asian and American identities as a creative source for humor that reflects the complexities of Filipino American history and multiethnicity.

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[1]Ron Muriera, personal interview with author, 1994. See Fred Cordova, Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall,/Hunt, 1983).

[2]Leny Mendoza Strobel, "The Cultural Identity of Third-Wave Fili[2] Ron Muriera, personal interview with author, 1994.

[2]See Fred Cordova, Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall,/Hunt, 1983).

[2]Leny pino Americans," Journal of the American Association for Philippine Psychology 1:1 Summer 1994 37-54. Strobel notes that stages of identity are often overlapping and intertwined rather than clearly distinct or separate. Strobel uses the term "third-wave" to refer Filipino Americans who arrived after 1965 when the United States revised immigration quotas for Asian countries. This group was composed predominantly of Filipinos from the urban middle class whose worldviews and values were shaped by the hegemonic American educational system and dominant culture. See also, Antonio Pido, The Pilipino in America: Macro/Micro Dimensions of Immigration and Integration. (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1986).

[3]Darby Li Po Price "Humorous Hapas, Performing Identities" Amerasia Journal 23:1 (1997):99-111.

[4]Sucheng Chan, Asian Americans: An Interpretive History (Boston: Twayne Publishing, 1991).

[5]Reflecting popular sentiments of the nineteenth century towards

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people of Asian descent, journalist Bret Hart wrote in Writings of Bret Harte (1877) of the Chinese in California "they seldom smile, and their laughter is of such an extraordinary and sardonic nature--so purely a echanical spasm, quite independent of any mirthful attribute--that to this day I am doubtful whether I ever saw a Chinaman laugh." Bret Harte, "John Chinaman," Writings of Bret Harte, vol. 14. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1896): 220. In James S. Moy, "The Death of Asia on the American Field of Representation," eds. Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Amy Ling Reading the Literatures of Asian America (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992). For a discussion of how different groups have been stereotyped as not funny as a form of marginalization, see Susan Purdie, Comedy: The Mastery of Discourse (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).

[6]Asian Week columnist Bill Wong writes "the very fact" that "Asian Americans are comedians defies stereotypes." William Wong, "Bill Wong Column," Asian Week, Sept. 27, 1991.

[7] See Darby Li Po Price "'All American Girl' and the American Dream" Critical Mass: A Journal of Asian American Cultural Criticism 2:1(Winter 1994-95):129-146.

[8] Personal interviews.

[9]Darrell Y. Hamamoto, Monitored Peril: Asian Americans and the Politics of T.V. Representation (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,1994): 17.

[10]Al Manalo, personal interviews, 1993-1995.

[11] Jonathan Y. Okamura "The Filipino American Diaspora: Sites of Space, Time, and Ethnicity" In (Eds.) Gary Okihiro, Marilyn Alquizola,

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Dorothy Fujita Rony, K. Scott Wong Privileging Positions: The Sites of Asian American Studies (Pullman, WA: Washington State Press, 1995): 387-400.

[12]Mohadev L. Apte, Humor and Laughter: An Anthropological Approach (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985): 261.

[13]Rex Navarette, live performance, Holy City Zoo, San Francisco, 1993.

[14]Penelope Flores writes that "Filipinos in America are the least understood immigrant group among America's minorities today." Penelop V. Flores, "The Philippine American Youth Between Two Expectations: Filipino and U.S. Parenting Standards," Journal of the American Association for Philippine Psychology 1:1 Summer 1994:55.

[15] "Virtually all" Filipinos are multiracial. See Maria P. P. Root "Within, Between, and Beyond Race" In Maria P. P. Root (Ed.) Racially Mixed People in America (California: Sage, 1992):3-11; Fred Cordova "The Filipino-American: There's Always an Identity Crisis" In S. Sue and N. Wagner (Eds.) Asian Americans: Psychological Perspectives (California: Science and Behavior Books, 1973).

[16]Manalo, live performance, Wellesly College, Boston, January 1994.

[17]Andy Bumatai "Stand Up Comic Andy Bumatai 198421994" audio recording (Honolulu: Tropical Jam Recording Studios, 1994).

[18]Ron Muriera, personal interviews, 1993-1995.

[19]Tessie Chua, personal interviews, 1993-1995.

[20]Tessie Chua, live performance, Holy City Zoo, San Francisco, 1993.

[21]Clarence Sterling, live performance, Ohanna Cultural Center, Oakland, 1991.

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[22]Kennedy Kabasares, personal interviews, 1993-1995.

[23]Kennedy Kabasares, live performance, Holy City Zoo, San Francisco, 1993.

[24]Allan Manalo, live performance, 1994.

[25]For an in-depth analysis of the U.S. military role in prostitution in Asia, see Saundra Pollock Sturdevant and Brenda Stoltzfus, Let the Good Times Roll: Prostitution and the U. S. Military in Asia (New York: New York Press, 1992).

[26]Strobel notes that the worldviews and value systems of most post-1965 Filipino American immigrants are results of a U.S. patterned educational system and otherwise hegemonic cultural system. (37) For an analysis of the socio-economic status of Filipino Americans, see Cabezas, A., Shinagawa, L., and Kawaguchi, G., "New Inquiries into the Socioeconomic Status of Pilipino Americans in California," Amerasia Journal 13:1, 1-21. According to Jonathan Okamura "Filipino Americans appear to receive less economic returns in terms of income and occupational status for their educational attainment level compared to other ethnic groups which is very likely the result of discriminatory employment practices . . . unequal treatment especially affects professionally trained and college educated immigrants who encounter downgrading from their previous positions in the Philippines." Okamura (1995): 376.

[27]Al Manalo and Rex Navarette, live performance, Asian American Jazz Festival, Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, 1992.

[28]The Ohanna Cultural Center was not able to sponsor the competition in 1994 due to economic constraints.

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[29]The 1997 cast included Allan Manalo, Patty Cachapero, Kevin Camia, Ramon Marcel Abad, Rene Acosta, Esperanza Catubig, Billy Conti, Rhoda Gravador, Apollo Madayag, Mark Marking.

[30]Kevin Camia, Allan Manalo, Patty Cachapero, and Kennedy Kabasares, "Tsis Mis" live performance, 1997.

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Chapter Eight

HAWAIIAN MOKES WITH MIXED JOKES

> Hawaii is a chop suey nation--Portagee, Pake, Buddha Head, Sole, Kanaka, Haole--all mixed up. Nobody is in the majority here. We are all part of at least one minority group. Some of us are part of several minority groups. And we all laugh at ourselves. This is healthy.---Frank De Lima, comedian[1]

> I figure if a Japanese person married a Portuguese person the baby would be hapa, huh? Pretty good looking but not just Japanese, not just Portuguese. The baby goin' to be Japortuguese.---Rap Raplinger, comedian[2]

Celebrations of interracial mixing as a site of joyful humor in Hawaii run counter to the dominant marginalization of mixed race identity as a tragic situation.[3] Drawing upon extensive ethnographic research and interviews, this chapter analyzes multiracial identities among comedians in Hawaii. How is local culture and the conception of Hawaii as a "Multiethnic Paradise" conducive to multiethnic humor? How do cultural currents and crosscurrents mediate which

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groups are considered funny? Why are certain heritages privileged or performed over others? How do performances of identities among Pacific Islander descent multiracial/ethnic comedians cater to and affect communities to which they are connected by ancestry or socialization?

Multiethnic Humor in Paradise

> I'm half Japanese and half haole. When I go to Hawaii I feel like a Jew going to Israel.--Jackson Purdue, comedian.

> We in Hawai'i buck the common sense when we celebrate those among us whose ethnicity, contrary to common-sense appearances and claims, is not clear. This cherished paradox is reflected in the widespread intermarriage and the total lack of stigma attached to the ethnic or racial in-betweens, the `hapas' as they are called. The `hapas' are also represented in the local jokelore when in making fun of crosses between stereotypes we demonstrate the idiocy of taking ethnicity seriously: "What do you get when you cross a Portagee

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with a Pake? Someone who saves all his money, but can't remember why."---Fred Blake, professor[4]

Acceptance of ethnic humor in Hawaii is applauded as integral aspect of a local culture characterized by jovial relations between ethnic groups. According to comedian Pat Morita "Laughter or aka aka in Hawaii is called the best medicine necessary on an island with mixed ethnic groups"[5]

Mono-ethnic identities are routinely ridiculed to undermine beliefs that any group is superior. According to comedian Frank De Lima "our ability to laugh at the absurdity of setting any one race above another is an excellent defense against bigotry"[6] Humor about various ethnic groups contributes to a cohesive "in-group" local identity more than inter-group conflict. According to Professor Fred Blake "the joking is `interrethnic' in that each group takes its turn as the butt of a joke. The joke is not so much on a particular group as it is on all the groups. The joke is on the thing that separates local people into different groups, that is to say, the joke is on ethnicity itself"(Blake 7).[7] Due to the familiarity of peoples of various ethnicities through neighbors, work, and family, locals don't take the stereotypes seriously.[8] De Lima attributes close relations with

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peoples of different ethnic groups as conducive to enjoying local ethnic humor "A lot of us are mixed ancestry, grew up in neighborhoods where we had grandma and grandpa with accents. Very few of us grew up without liking this local humor".[9]

As a playful counterpart to James Michener's reference in his novel Hawaii to hapas as the beautiful "golden people,"[10] De Lima combines Asian and European names to create unsavory hapa "Characters Left Out of James Michener's Novel About Hawaii": "Kimo Therapy, Saimin Legree, Terry Yaqui, Pua Ting, Lei Down, Masa Kerr, Lynn Ching, Kim Chee, and Mo Chee."[11] Such unappealing "Eurasian" names are incongruous with the local image of hapas as beautiful people. De Lima has been praised for "Amerasian" cultural hybridity in comic hapa characters such as the martial artist/rapper "Lup Chuong Ice," glass-slippered Filipina/American "Titarella," Hawaiian/American rockstar "Tita Turner," and the born in Chinatown "Bruce Springroll."[12]

The metaphor of "a salad bowl" is used to describe Hawaiian society as a place where different groups live harmoniously without giving up their ethnic differences. Comedian Rap Reiplinger greets viewers in his video "Rap's Hawaii," with "You're always welcome over here at my house. We are friends over here in Hawaii, so let

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memory go . . . in the paper the other day this guy said Hawaii was the Melting Pot of the Pacific. I had thoughts about that. I think Hawaii is more like one salad bowl of the Pacific. . . one guy tomato, one guy lettuce, one guy celery. They're all inside the pot together but they're all different."[13]

The metaphor of the salad bowl asserts that it is okay to be different and such difference is desirable. It also serves as a precursor for the celebration of mixed race identity within individuals as a symbol of Hawaiian-ness. Rap Reiplinger views his multiracial identity as a microcosm of Hawaiian society. "Me, I'm living proof of the people of Hawaii. You know what my nationalities is: Huh? Well, just by looking what your think? Huh? I'll tell you. Me I'm Hawaiian, Chinese, I'm Japanese, I'm Portuguese, I'm Haole, I get Puerto Rican, I get Spanish, oh I got all of them pieces jammed up inside of me."[14] Establishing ancestral ties to many groups provides a precursor to telling jokes about various ethnic groups and combinations.

In Hawaii its okay to make fun of different ethnic groups according to De Lima because "if we're all going to get along we can't take our ethnicities too seriously": "intermarriage should happen, they result in the cutest babies. And the cutest baby I ever saw was born here--it was Portugee, Filipino, Hawaiian, French, Japanese, and

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Somoan--and really fat to hold all those ethnicities!" His comedy partner Glen Medeiros asks "what are you?" De Lima answers "Portagee, French, German, Hawaiian, and fat too!"[15]

A major justification for the acceptance of local ethnic humor is the conception of Hawaii as a pluralistic society where all groups are equal and get along well. The image of Hawaii as a multiethnic paradise where ethnicity is not a serious matter because groups are equal and racism is minimal[16] is an asset to comedians earning their living in a tourist-based economy. Good humored celebrations of ethnic differences assure Caucasians they can have fun where it is fun to be part of a minority group, and the more the merrier. Countering mainland racial which deems ethnic jokes politically incorrect, tourists are reassured by good natured locals happily welcoming them with an "aloha spirit" generously humored with ethnic jokes.

Crosscurrents

> Here in Hawaii the ethnic melting pot can be more of a boiling pot--it's a veneer of niceness--which is very Asian--but an undertow of racial tension.---Jaz Kaner, comedian[17]

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> There is a whole agency that perpetuates that ethnic crap--that aloha crap. When anything starts with something like "aloha"--it's a false creation used to sell a Hawaii that never was for the Tourism industry. ---- Andy Bumatai, comedian[18]

While much of the acceptance of local humor about different groups can be attributed to harmonious relations of a multiethnic paradise, there are significant socio-political crosscurrents which challenge such sentiments. To not acknowledge economic, political, or cultural inequalities naturalizes such imbalances.[19] While some view Hawaii as a "multicultural" or "multiethnic paradise", others see a historical legacy of European and American hegemony and racism.[20] [21] Due to expectations and constraints posed by both tourists and locals, mixed race identities, especially those with partial Hawaiian or Pacific Islander ancestry, are a greater asset to comedians than mono-ethnic identities in general, and Caucasian identities in particular.

Missionaries appalled at indigenous cultures prohibited native languages as well as the most humorous feature of hula comedy--

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overt sexual references. While contemporary cultural forces are less overtly coercive than in missionary times, mandates of the tourist dominated economy strongly influence what type of comedy is commercially viable. Tourists inhibit local and native humor because of their inability to understand or appreciate pidgin language, cultural references, and perspectives. Local comedians have to cut out or limit local language and cultural references to appeal to tourist audiences.

Ventriloquist Freddie Morris initially took the role of a native Hawaiian and used a white dummy with red hair and freckles named Archie as a counterpart. To reduce the chances of offending tourists with native Hawaiian perspectives, Morris adopted his persona as a hapa-haole and Archie was replaced with Moku, a brown skinned "native" Hawaiian dummy. Morris initially spoke pidgin through Moku, but "had to teach Moku standard English because the tourists had a hard time understanding pidgin."[22]

The tourist-based economy is largely responsible for commercializing ethnic humor that reflects mainstream Euro-American sensibilities. The larger comedy clubs are housed in hotel complexes and cater primarily to Euro-American tourist audiences. Tourists from mainland are imbued with the dominant racial paradigm.

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One response to Euro-American dominance is anti-haole sentiments. The term haole, as Kent explains, initially gave an ethnic name to the ruling class of mostly European ancestry who mandated racial hierarchy and segregation on the plantations (Kent 132). United by their subjection to haole power, non-Caucasians viewed haoles as culturally inferior. Haole has historically held a lower cultural status in local culture. Ronald Johnson writes "Haole means, literally `stranger' or, more exactly, `one who cannot speak'"[23] Along these line, La'ia qualifies his pidgin glossary in Ask Bu with "No worry, Dis only fo' da haoles".

In discussing the stigma associated with being haole, Blake explains haole is associated with "fool" or "dumb" as in "dumb haole". "the kind who can analyze a joke to death but can't tell a joke to save his life!"(8) Blake recalls Reiplinger joke "I never tell jokes about haoles . . . because haoles are not funny [then proceed to tell jokes about haoles]" (8). Irvine attributes the high ration of haoles in comedy club audiences to a humor deficient culture: "who else would pay for humor except people from a humor deficient society or culture?"[24] According to Irvine "In Hawaii the shoe is on the other foot--it's cool to be brown, not cool to be white".

Mike Woodward, considered Hawaii's first haole standup comedian in 1978s "I don't do jokes about other races because it's not safe."[25]

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Local jokes view haole identity as a liability: "what do you call a haole surrounded by three Samoans? In trouble."

Comedians with phenotypically white appearances may encounter difficulties in establishing Hawaiian identities. One way for phenotypically white comedians to establish Hawaiian identity is through audio recordings that feature local linguistic or cultural references and avoid revealing their appearances. For example, Kent Bowman's fourth record "No Talk Stink!" subtitled "A collection of "da kine" luau jokes by Kent Bowman" explains on the back cover this "true-fack story":

> This album is a product of Bowman's French Quarter (the other three quarters are Hawaiian, Scottish and English).
>
> When he made his first recordings in pidgin English, Bowman managed to preserve a certain amount of anonymity behind cartoon album jackets . . . Now, for the first time, it seems to him to be reasonably safe that his face and all (almost) be put on public display on the front of an album. No longer will he find himself in situations like when he went "to the country" one time to entertain at a benefit: a covey of Hawaiian ladies took one look and said loudly, "as not heem, 'as a ******* haole!"[26]

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In short, despite being one quarter Hawaiian by ancestry, Bowman avoided showing pictures of himself (as well as making references to his ancestries) on his first three records, until after he established himself through his recorded pidgin humor, because he assumed he would be labeled a haole on the basis of his phenotypically European appearances.

Tourists' desires to be entertained by "native" Hawaiians can have a marginalizing effect. Whereas racial or ethnic appearances are not readily visible on records, tapes, or cds, in standup comedy race, ethnicity, and other physical attributes become part of the performer's persona that is not easily avoided.[27]

Caucasian comedian's attempts to establish local identity may be undermined through audience responses during performances as in the following interaction:

> Jaz Kaner "Aloha!"
>
> Audience: "Aloha!!!"
>
> Jaz Kaner: "It looks like most of you are from out of state"
>
> Audience member: "You too!"[28]

Jaz Kaner resents being classified on the basis of his Caucasian

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phenotypic features over his local birth, cultural background, and linguistic abilities. According to Kaner "I do pidgin that only a local could do, but haoles still come up and ask me if I really grew up here. I don't know anyone that can do pidgin that didn't grow up here." His act began as an ethnic act as a haole who was "under the gun" growing up in Hawaii": "I went to public schools--I have the bruises to prove it." However, Kaner believes that mainlanders don't understand his humor about having it rough growing up white. He was also constrained in his attempt to do ethnic characters such as a Chinese martial artist, a Japanese rockstar, and an African American rapper because people think it is politically incorrect for a white guy to do such impersonations of non-whites. According to political correctness it is more acceptable to joke about groups comedians belong to than ones they don't. Kaner notes how mixed descent comedians are advantaged: "Freddie Morris gets away with doing all kinds of impersonations of Japanese because he's part Japanese."[29]

While haole identity can be a cultural liability in Hawaii, partial Caucasian ancestry can be an asset when used as a point of identification between comedians and Caucasian audiences. Cabang explains "I tell haoles in the audience so they won't feel bad I'm part haole. I'm Portuguese--that's haole--and Pilipino, so I'm a `jalapino'" [pronounced haole-pino].[30] Comedians with Caucasian appearances

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can refer to partial Islander heritage to bridge the gap between Caucasians and Islanders. Sage, who specializes in accents, jokes "most people don't realize I'm Samoan. It's because I'm albino. My favorite Samoan/Irish pub right down on Merchant Street--OataPali's. Like for Christmas they sing `It was the night before Christmas and all through the Pali, we got plenty corn beef, and oh my golly!'"[31]

Freddie Morris is a local ventriloquist and musical comedian who does dialogues with a dark brown "Native Hawaiian" dummy named Moku Kahama. Morris gained childhood celebrity status as a ventriloquist on a television series. When Morris began working clubs he presented himself as a local Hawaiian and used a white dummy with red hair and freckles named Archie as his counterpart. His manager advised Morris to switch roles with Archie and replace him with a Native dummy: "I needed a Hawaiian dummy because I didn't look Hawaiian enough." Although he would explain they both grew up in Hawaii, neither of them looked Hawaiian enough to be speaking pidgin. Besides, people had difficulty understanding pidgin anyway: "Archie was born in Spain and moved to Hawaii at age one. Archie was talkin' da kine [pidgin] but people didn't get it. I had to learn to enunciate. People hear me now and say "you don't sound like you're from here, you have an accent." It's because I had to

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learn."

Dressed in a white suit and shiny polyester shirt with four buttons down to display his many gold chains, Morris introduces himself on stage with "I'm one quarter Japanese and Italian, German, French, and a little bit of Cherokee American Indian, and I grew up in Hawaii." While Morris makes jokes about all ethnicities, the Japanese seem to be his favorite target. Anti-Japanese jokes can be viewed as a way for local comedians to bond with Euro-American tourists through a common sense of American nationalism that views Hawaii as American. Playing upon such nationalist sentiments, Morris tells the waitress "bring Ed a drink, put it on the tab of the Japanese guy that owns the hotel and tell him thanks for bombing our harbor."[32]

Morris dons an oversize black framed costume glasses, a large plastic camera, and a psuedo accent to caricature Japanese tourists. He pulls out one of the eyes out of the glasses and jokes "I'm only part Japanese." Morris stuffs a large phallic object in the crotch of his pants and jokes "I used to be Japanese, but I quit because I found that was a problem" [pointing to his crotch]. "A part of me is Japanese that I'm not proud of" [looks down and grabs crotch] "I know why Japanese girls look like this [squints eyes and looks down] `ah so, ah so so small'". Further emasculating Japanese male

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sexuality, Morris asks two white women sitting together "are you married?" When they say "no" he asks "how would you like a little Japanese inside of you?" Embarrassed, they exclaim "no!"[33] Morris attributes his anti-Japanese feelings to his ex-wife because she was Japanese. Morris' could also be engaging in a hapa backlash to an ethnic group known for a relatively lower acceptance rate of hapas in Hawaii.[34]

Political correctness is viewed by some locals as a mainland cultural standard being imposed upon local culture. From this perspective mainland cultural hegemony is posing constraints to the free expression of local humor. Nonetheless, comedians of multiple ancestries have greater license to joke about more groups. There even seems to be a greater acceptance for multiethnic comedians to joke about groups beyond their own heritages. The following dialogue from the television special "Comedy in Hawaii: a Laugh a Minute" between moderator Lynn Waters (Caucasian) and comedians Mel Cabang (Filipino/Portuguese), Frank De Lima (Portuguese/Hawaiian), Billy Sage (Caucasian/Samoan) and Bo Irvine (Portuguese/Filipino/Scots/Hawaiian) juxtaposes dominant and local perspectives regarding the meaning of ethnic humor, political correctness, and multiethnicity.

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Waters: Start off by telling me your favorite ethnic joke.

Cabang: Okay, one ethnic joke, but jeez, what is an ethnic joke though?

De Lima: I don't know.

Cabang: Pilipino ethnic?

De Lima: You have the choice of Filipino or Portuguese, which one do you want?

Cabang: No mo' Chinese?

De Lima: No 'cuzz you're not. Oh, but the mixture of Filipino and Portuguese makes Chinese.

Cabang: Okay, I finished my joke. Your turn Billy.

Sage: How about Portapino?

Cabang: Portapino. Most people think that's a Pilipino you can take from one place to another place.

Waters: Okay, someone has to tell an ethnic joke.

Irvine: Okay, I'm Portuguese and Hawaiian so if you believe the stereotypes I'm dumb but too lazy to find out why.[35]

From the vantage point of political correctness "you have the choice" to joke about groups you're from rather than ones "you're not." From

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a mixed-centric perspective "mixture" could result in more than the sum of the originary parts. However, such humor may not satisfy dominant expectations that "an ethnic joke" about mixed offspring consist of an absurd juxtaposition of stereotypical traits from each of the parent groups.

The male dominance of comedy reveals Hawaii to be less than an ideal place for female comedians. In 1993 Kehau Biajo became Hawaii's first and only female standup comedian. Biajo considers herself "Hawaiian" although she is Hawaiian, Asian, and Caucasian descent. She says she doesn't have much ethnic or multiethnic specific material in her routine. Other comics have suggested she come up with more because it would be "a great hook." Following such advice, Kehau is developing more ethnic material starting with stereotypes and her interpretations of them. According to Baijo "the danger of ethnic/culture specific material is it's limitations re: audience." Paul Ogata, a local Japanese American comedian whom considers his material to be local or "regional" oriented, believes Baijo's material would be more useful for mainland gigs.

For Baijo her gender is more of a concern and poses more challenges than her ethnicity.

> As the only woman standup I've had more problems as a

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female than as a Hawaiian. Everything from men feeling I'm getting special treatment because I'm the only female to losing gigs because (and I quote) "you are better and funnier but I go way back with (male comic) so I owe him." It was an added struggle for the male comics to accept me when I first started. Besides learning the craft and the business, I had to contend with guys giving me attitude (and I quote again): "she's good, but let's see how long she lasts." So they wouldn't treat me like an equal, didn't help me.[36]

Reflecting the high demand for humor addressing ethnicity rather than gender identities in Hawaii, Kehau is featured along with Andy Bumatai, Frank De Lima, Mel Cabange, and Paul Ogata as part of the Bishop Museum's "From Bento to Mixed Plate" exhibit shown from October 1996 to January 1997. The exhibit features the comics individually on video doing a part of their act concerned with their ethnic heritage to show how different ethnic groups see themselves through humor.

Racial Characterization

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Ancestry is important to both dominant as well as native Hawaiian conceptions of identity.[37] Despite assertions that culture is more important than race in Hawaii, comedians find themselves judged and accepted/rejected in large part on the basis of their racial ancestry and phenotypic features.

Most comedians of partial Hawaiian descent market themselves by simply identifying themselves as "Hawaiian". Some comedians have observed that if they present themselves as "Hawaiian" both mainlanders and locals will be more interested in them than if they present themselves as any other ethnicity. Comedian Bo Irvine of Portuguese, Filipino, Scots, and Hawaiian descent observes people never paid him much attention until they found out he was part Hawaiian: "then all of a sudden they thought I was cool and wanted to talk to me".[38]

In short, comedians are rewarded for asserting Hawaiian ancestry.

Hawaiian comedians assert Hawaiian identity by referring to ancestry, "local" upbringing, or simply referring to themselves as "Hawaiian". Of these approaches, racial ancestry is the most effective way to establish Hawaiian identity among both tourist and local audiences. In short, it is prestigious to be part Hawaiian.[39]

De Lima establishes Hawaiian status through local upbringing

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and reference to partial Hawaiian ancestry. On his first album "A Taste of Malasades" he introduces his heritage as: "born on the rugged slopes of Punchbowl Crater to humble parentage of mostly Portuguese descent" and explains that he "became well-versed and knowledgeable in the customs of island cultures" through his "frequent contacts with Japanese and Chinese neighbors and by watching the Filipino fiesta" every weekend. According to De Lima "the Hawaiian came naturally, of course, by ways and means of pure Kanaka blood having been transfused down through his genetic heritage 3/4 pint).[40] De Lima further establishes Hawaiian identity in his joke book Frank De Lima's Joke Book by featuring a picture of himself on his chapter titled "Da Mixed Plate" which opens with his song "I'm local"[41], Some Hawaiian comedians say that he is not doing culturally Hawaiian comedy because while Hawaiians commonly make fun of themselves in their humor, they don't superficially play the stereotypes.[42]

Pacific Islander American multiethnic identity is simplified according to situation and acceptance within ethnic groups based on partial ancestry, family, practice, or place. While their mixed ancestry is usually acknowledged, Pacific Islanders often simplify their identities to Hawaiian, with European the most omitted ethnicity, Asian second most omitted, and Pacific Islander least

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omitted.[43]

Illustrating such a pattern, Andy Bumatai, of German, French, Filipino, and Hawaiian descent, is referred to by some as "Filipino" and others as "native `Hawaiian'" (although Bumatai lived in San Francisco until age nine). Local fact book Fax to Da Max includes "Andy Bumatai (nee Bumatay) Comedian/Actor" under "20 Filipinos who made good".[44] According to promotional material for the television series "Marker"

"native Hawaiian, Andy Bumatai portrays Pipeline, the loopy local".[45] Bumatai observes "I'm like an ethnic chameleon, as many different backgrounds as you come from is an advantage . . . most places I go, there is a group that will embrace me."[46]

Not wanting to be pigeon-holed as an "ethnic comedian" Andrew Bumatay adopted the name Andy Line as a stage name during his first year as a standup comedian in 1976-1977.[47] Then, influenced by the resurgence in local ethnic pride which became a major cultural movement in the nineteen-seventies, he switched his last name to Bumatai to make it appear more Hawaiian. Bumatai won strong local support through humor asserting ethnic pride and Hawaiian causes: "I'm 1/4 Filipino. My father is Filipino/Hawaiian . . . he loves to clean his yard but he no mo' land."[48] Bumatai's "All in the

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Ohana" [49] television show featuring himself as all five members of a pidgin speaking native Hawaiian family torn by generational and cultural differences but brought together in their struggle to keep their land marked the height of his success.[50] When he moved to Los Angeles in an attempt to gain greater commercial success he lost the support of many locals who saw him as a "sell out". He came back but was unable to regain his former local popularity.[51]

Bumatai has mixed feelings about how people identify him according to his non-European ancestry and overlook his European heritage. "My mother is German so I guess I'm mostly that. I speak some Hawaiian (and have recently begun studying again) and no Filipino. . . ." [52] He jokes about incongruities in attributing personal behaviors to ethnicity:

> I do credit my Filipino blood as having given me the work ethic that has pulled me through some tough times and makes me unafraid to attempt difficult tasks. It's funny to me how when someone is successful everyone is quick to point out that `it's because they are this or that' but if someone is arrested at a preschool carrying an assault rifle the same people will point out that `it's not

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> because they are this or that'. . . post this where you think it will do the most good. I can take the heat I'm part Filipino."[53]

Bumatai believes common language about race is more damaging than jokes. "I was once described as non-white, which is a subtle way of saying white is the norm, and non-white not the norm . . . language is more dangerous than ethnic jokes. For example saying "minority" for non-whites when whites are the real minority".[54] The cover of Bumatai's "Andy Bumatai: Standup Comedian 198421994" features his face in Escher-style fragmentation. Both Hawaiians and mainlanders who classify him according to the racial binary of "white" or "non-white" provide grounds for his joke narratives. He recounts the irony of a Hawaiian woman in Georgia calling him white as an insult: "How come you talkin' li' dat bro? . . . bust out da pidgin . . . aw, you jus wan haole." Then in California he encounters "covert racism" during a film audition by a woman with a card with his name that says "non-white" underneath it.

> I asked "what is this `non-white' thing?". She was like "that's not official or anything, that's just my personal notes. So don't worry about it." It is interesting it is to be

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> categorized by what you're not because here we categorize so strongly by what you are. Only because it's easier. The "not" thing is very strange. Imagine if we did it that way: "Hey bro, you know Charlie, the guy who's not Chinese, Filipino, Samoan, or Portagee?" "No, I don't know him. What else isn't he?"

Bumatai's narrative deconstructs the logic of the dominant system of "white" and "non-white" by emphasizing it's inability to portray multiethnic identities. Bumatai tells the woman "it's interesting to be categorized by what you are not," but she was getting more upset and finally said, "well you're not white so you might as well face it!" Upon returning to Hawaii locals he grew up ask "Andy, howzit bro? What you be gettin' white?" Bumatai jokes "Yes, I'm trying to face it. It's like living in the middle of one of those Escher paintings. You know those paintings. You know those paintings where it starts off like a bird and it finally turns into a fish and right in the middle you don't really know what it is? That's like me in there--going aaahhh!!!"[55] Bumatai's joke narrative expresses his frustration at being erroneously racialized on both the mainland and Hawaii. It also reflects his experiences of initially becoming accepted as a local favorite, then being accused of being a sellout and losing local

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support upon moving to the mainland to become more successful.

Bu La'ia is a comedian with a penchant for political satire and is known for his pro-sovereignty stance, anti-haole militancy, and an attempt to run for governor. Some locals believe "the current king of comedy is Bu La'ia. He's a pretty high blood quantum Hawaiian and is funny as hell."[56] The racialized reference to "blood quantum" reveals the value of partial Hawaiian ancestry in establishing Hawaiian identity. Names are also symbolic of heritage.[57] "Bu La'ia" is an invented name. Originally it began as "Bull Liar" a satirical statement about politicians' credibility, changed to Bu 'la' ia', then Bu La'ia. La'ia constructs a multiracial Hawaiian identity with parental names in the biographical description "Bu La'ia was born to Papa La'ia (who claims to be Duke Kahanamoku's son) and Mother Theresa . . . ."[58]

La'ia uses "mixed race" as a point of differentiation between the mainland and Hawaii: "This is Hawaii, this not United States. Filipino, Portuguese, Samoan, all mixed race."[59] La'ia emphasizes Hawaiian-ness over his other ethnicities "You an' five thousand oddah people like inquire about da same thing. How much Hawaiian am I. Ok, one mo' time: Bu La'ia is 100 percent Hawaiian, 10 percent Chinese, 5 percent Haole, an' 3 percent Samoan"[60] (42) La'ia asserts

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that Hawaiian identity is more cultural than racial. In response to a boy who says he is Portuguese, Filipino, Chinese, and Spanish but wishes he was Hawaiian, La'ia says "You say you not Hawaiian but dass okay because if you got Hawaiian heart, das da place to staht".[61]

La'ia's "Hawaiian" image is visually enhanced through photographs on his book and tapes that feature him wearing black dreadlocks style hair and a missing front tooth. However, the hair is a wig over his short brown hair, and the "missing tooth" is a tooth made invisible with a black magic marker. La'ia makes references to his "puka teeth" (teeth with holes in them), and long dreadlocks hairstyle. His persona of a pidgin speaking homeless underclass Hawaiian underdog contrasts his background as an articulate Stanford University graduate.

Some say that La'ia plays up to the worst image of Hawaiians--and are critical of his coarse low class Hawaiian image and militantly anti-haole stance. Others credit La'ia for dealing with issues such as sovereignty, government, or social injustice in ways that other comedians won't touch. His anti-authority stance is featured in songs addressing the plight of native Hawaiians such as "Skateboarding Wuz Da Case" where La'ia recounts how airport security "handcuffed and choked" and "beat" him like "Rodney King" for riding a skateboard "`cuzz I look Hawaiian".[62] As political satire La'ia ran for

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governor (he was officially too young) with a joke platform stating "the first thing I'd do is give back the land". As evidence of local support, he receieved 5,784 votes for governor.

Mainstream sensibilities are offended by comedians that profess Hawaiian sovereignty and/or militancy towards tourists. Comedians known to have such stances, such as La'ia and Bumatai, have been banned from performing at tourist oriented clubs for "political and personal reasons".[63] Despite La'ia's comedy recordings, joke book,[64] featured performances, and local popularity, some discredit La'ia's humor by saying he "isn't really a comedian" and only has "five minutes" worth of material.[65] Undermining comedians who raise issues of colonialism and inequality by saying they are not "really" comedians caters to a tourist based political-economy which requires overlooking rather than addressing such issues.

The male dominance of comedy in Hawaii further elevates racial identification over other sites of difference such as gender. In 1993 Kehau Biajo became Hawaii's first and only female standup comedian. Biajo considers herself "Hawaiian" and is of Hawaiian, Asian, and Caucasian descent. She says she has focused more on gender issues than ethnic or multiethnic specific material in her routine. Other comics suggested that she come up with more ethnic

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material because it would be "a great hook."[66] However, according to Baijo "the danger of ethnic/culture specific material is it's limitations regarding audience." Moreover, Baijo feels gender has posed more challenges than ethnicity in her life. Gender has played a significant role in Baijo's experiences as a comedian:

> As the only woman standup I've had more problems as a female than as a Hawaiian. Everything from men feeling I'm getting special treatment because I'm the only female to losing gigs because (and I quote) "you are better and funnier but I go way back with (male comic) so I owe him." It was an added struggle for the male comics to accept me when I first started. Besides learning the craft and the business, I had to contend with guys giving me attitude (and I quote again): "she's good, but let's see how long she lasts." So they wouldn't treat me like an equal, didn't help me.[67]

According to Baijo, the situation improved for her after she had done comedy for a few years: "the situation has vastly improved from when I first started. But of course I had to `earn' my place by actually being funny. The playing field is a bit more equal, but then

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again we're a small community and the novelty of a female comic has probably worn off. And it only took 4 years!"

Reflecting a higher interest in humor addressing ethnicity rather than gender identities in Hawaii, Kehau is featured along with Andy Bumatai, Frank De Lima, Mel Cabange, and Paul Ogata as part of the Bishop Museum's "From Bento to Mixed Plate" exhibit shown from October 1996 to January 1997. The exhibit features the comics individually on video doing a part of their act concerned with their ethnic heritage to show how different ethnic groups see themselves through humor.

Mixed race is a commodity in comedy in Hawaii. Taking center stage in the Hawaii, multiethnic identities among comedians cater to a tourist-based economy based on the image of Hawaii as a multiethnic paradise. However the privileging of certain identities often results in the marginalization of other identities. While some multiethnic Hawaiian comedians serve as ethnic bridges providing a sense of we-ness capable of creating cross-ethnic bonding, others can be seen as disparaging certain groups. Contrary to its image as an island paradise, Hawaii is by no means an ethnic eden. In short, Hawaii is neither a multiethnic utopia nor a multiethnic Hell, which is evident in the performance of multiethnic humor and identities.

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Endnotes

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[1]Frank De Lima De Lima's Joke Book (Hawaii: Bess Press, 1991): v.

[2] Rap Raplinger "Rap's Hawaii" video recording (HI: Lee Enterprises, 1995).

[3]For a discussion of the marginalization of mixed race in American popular culture and comedy see Darby Li Po Price "Mixed Laughter and Multiethnic Humor" In (Eds.) Paul Spickard and Jeffrey Burroughs We Are A People: Narrative in the Construction of Multiplicity and Ethnic Identity (Temple University Press, 1998). For an analysis of the double marginalization of identities of partial Asian descent as "humorless" due to their mixed heritage and Asian image see Darby Li Po Price "Humorous Hapas, Performing Identities" Amerasia Journal 23:1, 1997, 99-112..

[4]Fred Blake "Interrethnic Humor in Hawaii" In (Ed.) Joel Cohn The Comic in the Culture (Hawaii: University of Hawaii, 1996): 8. The joke combines stereotypical characteristics of Portagee [Portuguese] stupidity with Pake [Chinese] thriftiness.

[5]Pat Morita "Pat Morita's Mixed Plate of Comedy" KGMB 1985.

[6]Frank De Lima and Na Kolohe "Don't Sneeze When You Eat Saimin:

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Live at the Noodle Shop" record (Hawaii: Pochalinga Productions, 1980).

[7]Fred Blake "Interrethnic Humor in Hawaii" In (Ed.) Joel Cohn The Comic in the Culture (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1996): 7.

[8]For a discussion of how the integrated work sites of platation society led to familiarity among ethnic groups, see Ronald Takaki Pau Hana: Plantation Life and Labor in Hawaii, 1835-1920 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1983).

[9]"Comedy in Hawaii".

[10] James A. Michener Hawaii (New York: Random House, 1959).

[11]De Lima (1991):96

[12] Frank De Lima "The Best of De Lima" video/audio recording (HI: Pocholinga Productions, 1988); Frank De Lima "The Best of De Lima Too!" video/audio recording (HI: Pocholinga Productions, 1991).

[13] Rap Reiplinger "Rap's Hawaii" video recording (Hawaii: Lee Enterprises, 1995).

[14] Reiplinger "Rap's Hawaii".

[15] Frank De Lima, live performance, 1995.

[16]Davis writes "The history of Hawaii has been one of amicable relations among ethnic groups--cultural pluralism" (Davis 127). "The Hawaiian tradition of egalitarian pluralism for mixed-race people

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poses the sharpest contrast in the world to the hypodescent or one-drop rule" (Davis 128). With interracial mixing commonplace, by 1898 racially and ethnically mixed people were the largest segment of the Hawaiian population, at least one-third, with intermarriage rates at 45% (116). F. James Davis "The Hawaiian Alternative to the One Drop Rule" in (ed.) Naomi Zack American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995). Kent considers four factors to counter racial polarization in Hawaii. Formal racial equality, interracial marriage legitimized, localism--a polycultural pan-ethnic collective Hawaiian identity with maintenance of ethnic consciousness and cultures based on subordination of ethnic groups to a Caucasian elite, and Asian upward mobility and empowerment. (Kent 94): 131. Status differences exist, but no one group is generally agreed to be highest, nor majority. Vital Statistics (State of Hawaii, 1989) in Cookie White (1991).

[17]Jaz Kaner, personal interview with author, 1994. For an account of rising into in Hawaii see "Edward McLaurin "A Community in Conflict: Has Hate Come to videorecording, host Frank De Lima, (Honolulu: KITV, 1993).

[18] Andy Bumatai, personal interview with author, 1994.

[19]According to Coco Fusco "not to recognize historical imbalances and

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their influences is *the* strategical evasion that enables the already empowered to naturalize their advantage." Coco Fusco English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas (New York: The New Press, 1995).

[20] See Franklin Odo "Is There a Future for our Past? Cultural Preservation Policy," in The State of Asian Pacific America: A Public Policy Report (California: LEAP Asian Pacific American Public Policy Institute and UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1993):113-126. Odo writes "Hawai'i has always had a majority of people of color but it has always, since the early 1800s, been subject to the arbitrary demands of European and American hegemony. As part of the United States since 1898, it has always been subject to the demands of American racism as well" (124).

[21]Davis writes "Hawaiian and part Hawaiians have experienced unemployment, poverty, and disease from colonial relationships" (127).

[22] personal interview with author, 1995.

[23]Ronald C. Johnson "Offspring of Cross-Race and Cross-Ethnic Marriage in Hawaii" in (Ed.) Maria P. P. Root Racially Mixed People in America (1992): 241.

[24]In contrast to the mainland representation of Asians as not having a

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sense of humor, when asked if local comedians perform for Japanese tourists Irvine responded "no because they're already smiling and laughing anyway. Forty Japanese tourists came into the comedy club, paid, left after five minutes bowing and laughing." Bo Irvine, personal interview with the author, 1995.

[25] Morita 1985.

[26]Kent Bowman, "No Talk Stink" audio record (Hawaii: Hula Records, no date).

[27]David Marc writes physical attributes such as race and ethnicity are aspects of personal identity for standup comedians that are "a textual feature of the act that demands use--or requires avoidance." (1992:18)

David Marc, Comic Visions: Television Comedy and American Culture (Massachusetts: Unwin Hyman, 1992).

[28] Jaz Kaner, live performance, 1995.

[29] Jaz Kaner, personal interview with author, 1995. Kaner has moved to Los Angeles where he believes it is easier for him to make a living as a white comedian.

[30] "Comedy in Hawaii".

[31] "Comedy in Hawaii".

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[32] Freddie Morris, live performance, 1995.

[33] Freddie Morris, live performance, 1995.

[34] However, on the mainland Japanese Americans have a higher acceptance of hapas. Spickard (1997); Larry Hajime Shinagawa and Gin Yong Pang "Asian American Panethnicity and Intermarriage" Amerasia Journal 22:2 (1996):127-152.

[35] "Comedy in Hawaii: a Laugh a Minute" television special on "Dialogue" (Exec. Prod.) Edward Robello (Honolulu: Hawaii Public Broadcasting Authority, 1995).

[36] Baijo adds "only Andy Bumatai was immediately supportive. After him, Paul." Kehau Baijo, personal letter to author, 1997.

[37] Haunani-Kay Trask emphasizes the importance of Hawaiian ancestry in identifying as Hawaiian: "In Polynesian cultures, genealogy is paramount . . . our bloodlines and birthplace tell our identity." Trask, Haunani-Kay. 1993. In Spickard and Fong (1374).

[38] Personal interview with author, 1995.

[39] Davis 1995: 125.

[40] Frank De Lima, "Frank De Lima presents A Taste of Malasades" audio record (Hawaii: Hula Records, 1978).

[41] Also on Frank De Lima "Da Year of Da Moke" audio recording (Honolulu: Pocholinga Productions, 1987).

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[42]Anonymous Hawaiian comedian, personal interview with author, 1995.

[43] Paul R. Spickard and Rowena Fong "Pacific Islander Americans and Multiethnicity: A Vision of America's Future?" Social Forces June 1995, 73 (4):1365-1383.

[44] Filipinos are most accepting of part Filipinos (Spickard 1997: 52) ; Jerry Hopkins, Douglas Simonson, Pat Sasaki, Ken Sakata Fax to Da Max (Honolulu: Bess Press, 1985): 104.

[45] "Marker" website (Hawaii Online, 1995).

[46] Bumatai, personal interview with author, 1994.

[47]R. G. Ursul "Local Boy Eyes Big Time: Andy Line: Struggling Comic" Windward Sun Press June 29-July 5, 1977. A-15. He was also "Captain Wacky Pop" for awhile.

[48]In John Pescador "Andy Bumatai--Star of the Series Marker" In "Filipinos in TV, Radio, and Print" website http://pubweb.acns.nwu.edu/~flip/tv.html (1995).

[49] 'Ohana means extended family bonded with an overriding goal. It commonly refers to peoples with a lasting commitment to one another to share tasks, responsibility, resources, or work together.

[50] Andy Bumatai "All in the Ohana" (Honolulu: KGMB-TV, 1980); Wayne Harada Andy Bumatai's Ohana (New York: Lee Publishers,

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1981); Andy Bumatai and Tremaine Tamayose (Eds.) "Andy Bumatai `All in the Ohana'" audio record (Honolulu: Bluewater Records, 1980).

[51]Anonymous local Hawaiian comedian, personal interview 1995.

[52]Pescador, 1995.

[53] Pescador, 1995.

[54] Andy Bumatai, personal interview with the author, 1994.

[55] Andy Bumatai "Stand Up Comic Andy Bumatai 198421994" audio recording (Honolulu: 1994).

[56] Jacques Y. Yerby, personal communication, 1996.

[57]According to Lilikala Kame'eleihiwa "Ancestral identity is revealed in the names that Hawaiians carry" "the name collects its own mana [power, spirit, authority, identity] and endows the successor who carries it." Lilikala Kame'eleihiwa Native Land and Foreign Desires (Honolulu: Bishop Museum, 1992). In Spickard and Fong 1375.

[58] Bu La'ia Ask Bu: Bu La'ia Ansas all Kine Questions, Li' Dat (Honolulu: Keefah, 1995).

[59] Bu La'ia "False Crack" audio recording (Hawaii: Big Poi Records, 1995).

[60] La'ia Ask Bu.

[61] La'ia Ask Bu 12.

[62] Bu La 'ia "Hawaii's Most Wanted" audio tape (Hawaii: Kanaka,

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1996).

[63] Bo Irvine, personal interview with author, 1995.

[64] Bu La'ia "False Crack" audio recording (Honolulu: Kanaka, 1994) Bu La'ia "Hawaii's Most Wanted" audio recording (Honolulu: Kanaka, 1996);La'ia Ask Bu (1995).

[65]According to Mel Cabang "he's not really a comedian" and Bo Irvine "he played a character very well and it was funny but the problem is people will see a guy doing five minutes at a party and think he's great. Then they hire him to do forty or thirty minutes and find out he only had that five."In "Comedy in Hawaii" (1995).

[66] Kehau jokes about differences between haoles and Hawaiians which challenge stereotypical images of Hawaiians as lazy:

> One common myth is that hawaiians are lazy. That's not true. We're not lazy, we're efficient. You people [haoles] have way too much cutlery. Your dinner table looks like a Craftsman ratchet set display. They tell me "Kehau, you're supposed to start with the fork at the far left, and work your way in." You know, if I did that at my house, I'd be on the other side of the plate in less than 2 moves . . . and why do you need all those letters in your

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> alphabet--26! Hawaiians only have 13--and one isn't even a full letter. Yet we manage to compose songs, write poetry, record genealogy and generations of knowledge. You guys have lots of words with the same meaning--you have to have books whose only job is to record all those meanings. What an inefficient waste of paper. Hawaiians have one word with lots of meanings--the same word means fish, sun, money--one word and we're done. Save a tree--learn Hawaiian!

From a Caucasian perspective Hawaiian manners and language are inferior. However, from a Hawaiian point of view haole customs are impractical.

[67] Baijo adds "only Andy Bumatai was immediately supportive. After him, Paul." Kehau Baijo, personal letter to author, 1997.

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Conclusion

This study of the mediation of multiracial identities in comedy expands the conceptions of American ethnic humor beyond the body of works which approach race and ethnicity as homogenous and fixed groups. Multiracial humor reveals meanings of race to be socially and situationally constructed. Comparing and contrasting the comic agency of mixed race among different groups reveals how particular socio-political histories and identity politics shape, constrain, and/or facilitate expressions of racial and ethnic hybridity.

The African American comic mulatto remains the most marginalized figure despite success of African American comedy in general. Mulatto comedy emphasizes blackness over whiteness, as well as historical and current white racism. Chicano/Latino and Hawaiian comedy are most conducive to multiethnicity, yet diverge greatly in their political orientations. Chicano comedy asserts a collective mestizaje set in opposition to Anglo American and Mexican cultural hegemonies which marginalize indigenous heritage.

Chicano/Latino, Native American, Filipino American, and Hawaiian comedy privileges indigenous ancestry over European and

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other ancestries without denying any particular heritage. Their strong ethnic community and working class orientations are set in opposition to European and Euro-American colonization and cultural hegemonies.

Historically Chicano comedy has transformed negative dominant characterizations of Chicanos as cultural bastards into unorthodox symbols of collective pride. Emphasizing transnationalism and direct confrontation of national borders, Chicano/Latino humor is particularly conducive to multiethnic consciousness at both group and individual levels.

Native American comedians of mixed racial descent subvert the dominant image of Indians and mixed bloods as stoic, tragic, and humorless peoples. Due to their scarcity as Native American comedians, they identify and are identified as Indians to a greater degree than multiracial or multiethnic. Literature remains the most accessible venue for Native American mixed blood comic artists.

Asian American hapa comedians focus on individual first-generation experiences of mixed-ness. Hapa themes center on relations between Hapas and non-multiracial identified whites and Asians. Filipino American comedy asserts a collective mestizaje

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identity. Both hapa and Filipino American comedians subvert the figure of the Asian as lacking a sense of humor.

Hawaiian comedians assert individual multiethnicity within a conception of Hawaii as a multiethnic society. Hawaiian identity is first based upon Native ancestry and secondly local upbringing. Partial Native Hawaiian ancestry is more marketable than any singular ethnicity. As a result, other ethnicities are often subsumed within Hawaiian identity. Comedians catering to tourists emphasize the lack of racial and ethnic divisions between groups in Hawaii. Comedians critical of dominant power relations emphasize the historical European and Euro-American colonization of Hawaii.

Multiracial identities in comedy undermine the image of mixed race as a tragic situation. They challenge not only perceptions of the dominant group, but their socio-political status with ethnic minority groups which often mandate either-or allegiances as well. While multiracial identities in comedy remain inhibited by a popular entertainment industry that promotes monological conceptions of race and ethnicity, mixed race comedians contribute significantly to challenging such reductive categories..

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Issues for further study include: Will the growing public acknowledgment of multiracial identities, symbolized by the adoption of a "multiracial" category on the 2000 census, be accompanied by a continuing increase in cultural production of mixed race in comedy? Will comic mixed race figures displace the tragic trope in popular forms of entertainment such as television situation comedies or Hollywood? Will comic constructions of mixed race promote progressive coalitions across identity-based groups, or cause further divisions? Will multiracial identities support or undermine arguments that race and ethnicity are superficial constructed categories or that they no longer matter?

Debates over the meaning, importance, and implications of multiracial identities continue at all levels of society--from comedy clubs and campuses to presidential forums and the marketplace-- as our increasingly multiethnic America enters the twenty-first century.

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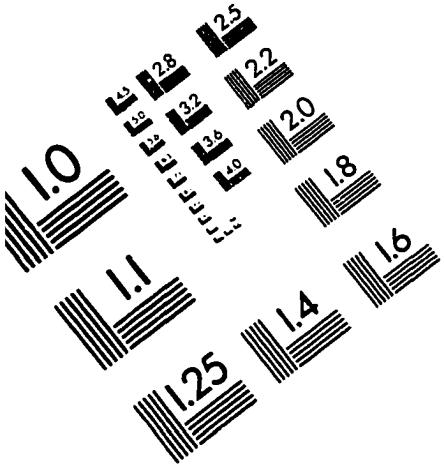
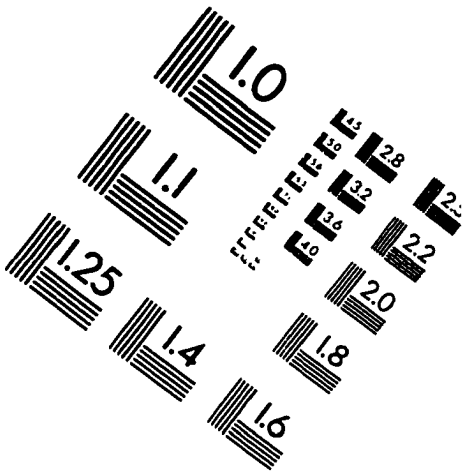
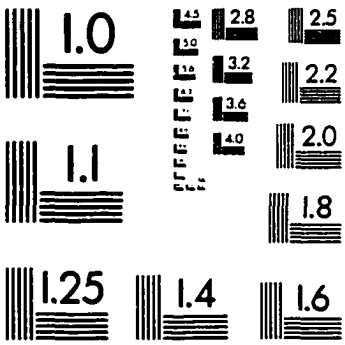
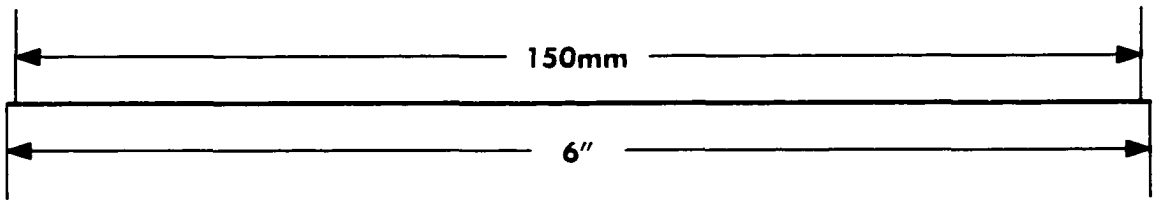
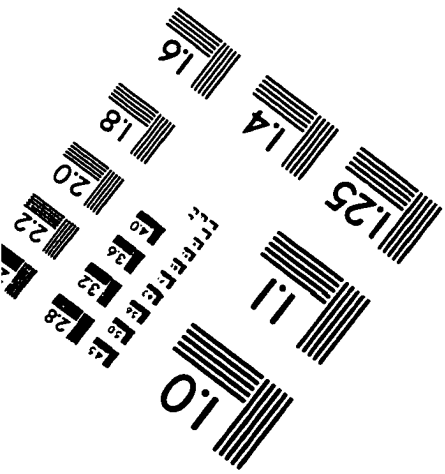
IMAGE EVALUATION
TEST TARGET (QA-3)

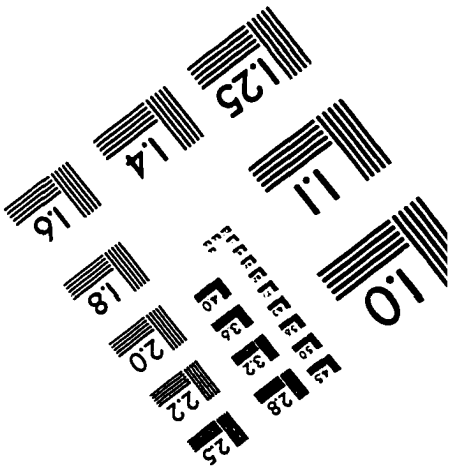












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